



**DELHI UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY**

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ✓

Cl. No. 0:3M042x D.4

Ac. No. 161285

Date of ~~release~~ for loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below. An overdue charge of 0.6 pK. will be charged for each day the book is kept overtime.

Old Manse Edition

**THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**

WITH PORTRAITS, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND FACSIMILES

IN TWENTY-TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME XIV



THE
DOLLIVER ROMANCE
AND KINDRED TALES

BY
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

COPYRIGHT, 1864, BY TICKNOR & FIELDS

COPYRIGHT, 1871 AND 1876, BY JAMES R. OSGOOD & CO.

COPYRIGHT, 1882 AND 1899, BY ROSE HAWTHORNE LATHROP

COPYRIGHT, 1900 AND 1904, BY HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY NOTE	ix
THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE	
A SCENE FROM THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE .	i
ANOTHER SCENE FROM THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE	25
ANOTHER FRAGMENT OF THE DOLLIVER RO-	
MANCE	42
SEPTIMIUS FELTON; OR, THE ELIXIR OF LIFE	69
APPENDIX: THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP; OUTLINES	
OF AN ENGLISH ROMANCE	329

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
BROODING IN HIS STUDY (page 85) <i>A. I. Keller</i>	
	Frontispiece
VIGNETTE ON ENGRAVED TITLE-PAGE: HE AND HIS DEAD WERE ALONE (page 112) <i>A. I. Keller</i>	
GREAT-GRANDPAPA AND PANSIE <i>E. Boyd Smith</i>	12
"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?" . <i>A. I. Keller</i> .	322
HIS HAND ON THE SLENDER ARM <i>A. I. Keller</i> .	358
"IS YOUR FRIEND ILL?" . . <i>A. I. Keller</i> .	384

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE order preserved in this volume is not the order of time. *The Dolliver Romance*, a fragment, was the latest of Hawthorne's writings, and this unfinished tale was laid on his coffin when it was in the church before burial ; but it represents the final form taken by an idea which for years had been haunting the author's brain. It would be strange indeed if one who brooded, as Hawthorne did, over the great mysteries of life and death should have been incurious respecting the greatest of all mysteries of human nature, that which concerns the perpetuity of life itself. "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" and "The Virtuoso's Collection" illustrate the manner in which he dwelt on the thought, and his journals contain entries which point in the same direction, as when after a lovely warm Sunday in September, 1843, he writes : "Such a day is the promise of a blissful eternity. Our Creator would never have made such weather, and given us the deep heart to enjoy it, above and beyond all thought, if he had not meant us to be immortal ;" and again in his English journal : "God himself cannot

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

compensate us for being born for any period short of eternity. All the misery endured here constitutes a claim for another life, and still more all the happiness ; because all true happiness involves something more than the earth owns, and needs something more 'han a mortal capacity for the enjoyment of it."

Mingling with this illustration of the theme of immortality was the grim fancy of a bloody footprint upon the threshold. In 1850 he had jotted down in his Note-Book the suggestion : "The print in blood of a naked foot to be traced through the street of a town." It is not likely that Hawthorne forgot this notion when, in 1855, he heard in England at Smithell's Hall the legend which he thus set down.

"The peculiarity of this house is what is called 'The Bloody Footstep.' In the time of Bloody Mary, a Protestant clergyman — George Marsh, by name — was examined before the then proprietor of the Hall, Sir Roger Barton, I think, and committed to prison for his heretical opinions, and was ultimately burned at the stake. As his guards were conducting him from the justice room, through the stone-paved passage that leads from front to rear of Smithell's Hall, he stamped his foot upon one of the flagstones in earnest protestation against the wrong which he was undergoing. The foot, as some say, left a bloody mark in the stone ;

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

others have it, that the stone yielded like wax under his foot, and that there has been a shallow cavity ever since. This miraculous footprint is still extant; and Mrs. — showed it to me before her husband took me round the estate. It is almost at the threshold of the door opening from the rear of the house, a stone two or three feet square, set among similar ones, that seem to have been worn by the tread of many generations. The footprint is a dark brown stain in the smooth gray surface of the flagstone; and, looking sidelong at it, there is a shallow cavity perceptible, which Mrs. — accounted for as having been worn by people setting their feet just on this place, so as to tread the very spot where the martyr wrought the miracle. The mark is longer than any mortal foot, as if caused by sliding along the stone, rather than sinking into it; and it might be supposed to have been made by a pointed shoe, being blunt at the heel, and decreasing towards the toe. The blood-stained version of the story is more consistent with the appearance of the mark than the imprint would be; for if the martyr's blood oozed out through his shoe and stocking, it might have made his foot slide along the stone, and thus have lengthened the shape. Of course it is all a humbug, — a darker vein cropping up through the gray flagstone; but it is probably a fact, and, for aught I know, may be found in

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

Fox's Book of Martyrs, that George Marsh underwent an examination in this house ; and the tradition may have connected itself with the stone within a short time after the martyrdom ; or, perhaps, when the old persecuting knight departed this life, and Bloody Mary was also dead, people who had stood at a little distance from the Hall door, and had seen George Marsh lift his hand and stamp his foot just at this spot, — perhaps they remembered this action and gesture, and really believed that Providence had thus made an indelible record of it on the stone ; although the very stone and the very mark might have lain there at the threshold hundreds of years before. But, even if it had been always there, the footprint might, after the fact, be looked upon as a prophecy, from the time when the foundation of the old house was laid, that a holy and persecuted man should one day set his foot here, on the way that was to lead him to the stake. At any rate, the legend is a good one."

In 1858, just before leaving England for the continent, he began to sketch the outline of a romance, based upon the attempt of an American to lay claim to an estate in England, the manor house of which was marked in this way. He did not foresee that the subject would be pushed aside by the more insistent story of *The Marble Faun*, and he made notes from time to

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

time before he abandoned the project, and these notes are reprinted in the present volume as an appendix, under the title *The Ancestral Footstep*.

The dates prefixed to the several passages indicate the progress he made in this outline ; they show also that though he was pretty industrious, he gave himself to the task only for about six weeks. Then, undoubtedly, his new interests and observations swallowed him up to the neglect of this venture. "Although," as Mr. Lathrop says, "the sketch is cast in the form of a regular narrative, one or two gaps occur, indicating that the author had thought out certain points which he then took for granted without making note of them. Brief scenes, passages of conversation and of narration, follow one another after the manner of a finished story, alternating with synopses of the plot, and queries concerning particulars that needed further study ; confidences of the romancer to himself which form certainly a valuable contribution to literary history. The manuscript closes with a rapid sketch of the conclusion, and the way in which it is to be executed. Succinctly, what we have here is a romance in embryo ; one, moreover, that never attained to a viable stature and constitution."

It was not till his return to America in 1861 that Hawthorne once more resumed the theme.

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

He was writing in his home, "The Wayside," at Concord, and recalled no doubt what he had himself written to G. W. Curtis in 1852: "I know nothing of the history of the house, except Thoreau's telling me that it was inhabited a generation ago by a man who believed he should never die." Some time between the return to America and the end of 1863 he had made two drafts of an attempted romance, one, *Dr. Grimshawe's Secret*, edited by his son Julian in 1882, the other *Septimius Felton*, recovered by his daughter Una, and printed as a serial in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1872, carrying with it, when published in book form, the following prefatory note, signed by Una Hawthorne.

"The following story is the last written by my father. It is printed as it was found among his manuscripts. I believe it is a striking specimen of the peculiarities and charm of his style, and that it will have an added interest for brother artists, and for those who care to study the method of his composition, from the mere fact of its not having received his final revision. In any case, I feel sure that the retention of the passages within brackets (*e. g.* p. 101), which show how my father intended to amplify some of the descriptions and develop more fully one or two of the character studies, will not be regretted by appreciative readers. My earnest thanks are due to Mr. Robert Browning for his

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

kind assistance and advice in interpreting the manuscript, otherwise so difficult to me."

Neither of these romances, *Septimius Felton* nor *Dr. Grimshawe's Secret*, had satisfied Hawthorne sufficiently to justify him in giving them to the world, and he made a fresh start, though at a time when half aware of it himself, he was slipping down the final earthly way. *The Dolliver Romance* therefore made slow progress, and somewhat against his better judgment, he consented to an arrangement by which it should be published serially in *The Atlantic*. He wrote to Mr. Fields, the editor of the magazine:—

"I don't see much probability of my having the first chapter of the Romance ready so soon as you want it. There are two or three chapters ready to be written, but I am not yet robust enough to begin, and I feel as if I should never carry it through."

The presentiment proved to be only too well founded. He had previously written:—

"There is something preternatural in my reluctance to begin. I linger at the threshold, and have a perception of very disagreeable phantasms to be encountered if I enter. I wish God had given me the faculty of writing a sunshiny book."

And again, in November, he says: "I foresee that there is little probability of my getting the first chapter ready by the 15th, although I

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

have a resolute purpose to write it by the end of the month." He did indeed send it by that time, but it began to be apparent in January that he could not go on.

"Seriously," he says, in one letter, "my mind has, for the present, lost its temper and its fine edge, and I have an instinct that I had better keep quiet. Perhaps I shall have a new spirit of vigor if I wait quietly for it; perhaps not." In another: "I hardly know what to say to the public about this abortive Romance, though I know pretty well what the case will be. I shall never finish it. . . . I cannot finish it unless a great change comes over me; and if I make too great an effort to do so, it will be my death."

Hawthorne died in the night between the 18th and 19th of May, 1864. The first chapter of *The Dolliver Romance* was published in *The Atlantic* for July of that year, and "Another Scene from the Dolliver Romance" in January, 1865. The third fragment which follows in this reissue is separated by a gap which there is no means of filling. Mr. Lathrop tells us:

"Hawthorne had purposed prefixing a sketch of Thoreau, 'because, from a tradition which he told me about this house of mine, I got the idea of a deathless man, which is now taking a shape very different from the original one.' . . . With the plan respecting Thoreau he combined

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

the idea of writing an autobiographical preface, wherein *The Wayside* was to be described, after the manner of his Introduction to the *Mosses from an Old Manse*; but, so far as is known, nothing of this was ever actually committed to paper."

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

A SCENE FROM THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

DR. DOLLIVER, a worthy personage of extreme antiquity, was aroused rather prematurely, one summer morning, by the shouts of the child Pansie, in an adjoining chamber, summoning old Martha (who performed the duties of nurse, housekeeper, and kitchen maid, in the Doctor's establishment) to take up her little ladyship and dress her. The old gentleman woke with more than his customary alacrity, and, after taking a moment to gather his wits about him, pulled aside the faded moreen curtains of his ancient bed, and thrust his head into a beam of sunshine that caused him to wink and withdraw it again. This transitory glimpse of good Dr. Dolliver showed a flannel nightcap, fringed round with stray locks of silvery white hair, and surmounting a meagre and duskily yellow visage, which was crossed and crisscrossed with a record of his long life in wrinkles, faithfully written, no doubt, but with such cramped chirography of Father Time that

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

the purport was illegible. It seemed hardly worth while for the patriarch to get out of bed any more, and bring his forlorn shadow into the summer day that was made for younger folks. The Doctor, however, was by no means of that opinion, being considerably encouraged towards the toil of living twenty-four hours longer by the comparative ease with which he found himself going through the usually painful process of bestirring his rusty joints (stiffened by the very rest and sleep that should have made them pliable) and putting them in a condition to bear his weight upon the floor. Nor was he absolutely disheartened by the idea of those tonsorial, ablutionary, and personally decorative labors which are apt to become so intolerably irksome to an old gentleman, after performing them daily and daily for fifty, sixty, or seventy years, and finding them still as immitigably recurrent as at first. Dr. Dolliver could nowise account for this happy condition of his spirits and physical energies, until he remembered taking an experimental sip of a certain cordial which was long ago prepared by his grandson, and carefully sealed up in a bottle, and had been repositied in a dark closet, among a parcel of effete medicines, ever since that gifted young man's death.

"It may have wrought effect upon me," thought the Doctor, shaking his head as he lifted it again from the pillow. "It may be so; for

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

poor Edward oftentimes instilled a strange efficacy into his perilous drugs. But I will rather believe it to be the operation of God's mercy, which may have temporarily invigorated my feeble age for little Pansie's sake."

A twinge of his familiar rheumatism, as he put his foot out of bed, taught him that he must not reckon too confidently upon even a day's respite from the intrusive family of aches and infirmities, which, with their proverbial fidelity to attachments once formed, had long been the closest acquaintances that the poor old gentleman had in the world. Nevertheless, he fancied the twinge a little less poignant than those of yesterday; and, moreover, after stinging him pretty smartly, it passed gradually off with a thrill, which, in its latter stages, grew to be almost agreeable. Pain is but pleasure too strongly emphasized. With cautious movements, and only a groan or two, the good Doctor transferred himself from the bed to the floor, where he stood awhile, gazing from one piece of quaint furniture to another (such as stiff-backed Mayflower chairs, an oaken chest of drawers carved cunningly with shapes of animals and wreaths of foliage, a table with multitudinous legs, a family record in faded embroidery, a shelf of black-bound books, a dirty heap of gallipots and phials in a dim corner), — gazing at these things, and steadying himself by the bedpost, while his inert

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

brain, still partially benumbed with sleep, came slowly into accordance with the realities about him. The object which most helped to bring Dr. Dolliver completely to his waking perceptions was one that common observers might suppose to have been snatched bodily out of his dreams. The same sunbeam that had dazzled the Doctor between the bed curtains gleamed on the weather-beaten gilding which had once adorned this mysterious symbol, and showed it to be an enormous serpent, twining round a wooden post, and reaching quite from the floor of the chamber to its ceiling.

It was evidently a thing that could boast of considerable antiquity, the dry rot having eaten out its eyes and gnawed away the tip of its tail; and it must have stood long exposed to the atmosphere, for a kind of gray moss had partially overspread its tarnished gilt surface, and a swallow, or other familiar little bird, in some by-gone summer, seemed to have built its nest in the yawning and exaggerated mouth. It looked like a kind of Manichean idol, which might have been elevated on a pedestal for a century or so, enjoying the worship of its votaries in the open air, until the impious sect perished from among men, — all save old Dr. Dolliver, who had set up the monster in his bedchamber for the convenience of private devotion. But we are unpardonable in suggesting such a fantasy to

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

the prejudice of our venerable friend, knowing him to have been as pious and upright a Christian, and with as little of the serpent in his character, as ever came of Puritan lineage. Not to make a further mystery about a very simple matter, this bedimmed and rotten reptile was once the medical emblem or apothecary's sign of the famous Dr. Swinnerton, who practised physic in the earlier days of New England, when a head of Æsculapius or Hippocrates would have vexed the souls of the righteous as savoring of heathendom. The ancient dispenser of drugs had therefore set up an image of the Brazen Serpent, and followed his business for many years with great credit, under this Scriptural device; and Dr. Dolliver, being the apprentice, pupil, and humble friend of the learned Swinnerton's old age, had inherited the symbolic snake and much other valuable property by his bequest.

While the patriarch was putting on his small-clothes, he took care to stand in the parallelogram of bright sunshine that fell upon the uncarpeted floor. The summer warmth was very genial to his system, and yet made him shiver; his wintry veins rejoiced at it, though the reviving blood tingled through them with a half-painful and only half-pleasurable titillation. For the first few moments after creeping out of bed, he kept his back to the sunny window, and seemed

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

mysteriously shy of glancing thitherward ; but, as the June fervor pervaded him more and more thoroughly, he turned bravely about, and looked forth at a burial ground on the corner of which he dwelt. There lay many an old acquaintance, who had gone to sleep with the flavor of Dr. Dolliver's tinctures and powders upon his tongue ; it was the patient's final bitter taste of this world, and perhaps doomed to be a recollected nauseousness in the next. Yesterday, in the chill of his forlorn old age, the Doctor expected soon to stretch out his weary bones among that quiet community, and might scarcely have shrunk from the prospect on his own account, except, indeed, that he dreamily mixed up the infirmities of his present condition with the repose of the approaching one, being haunted by a notion that the damp earth, under the grass and dandelions, must needs be pernicious for his cough and his rheumatism. But, this morning, the cheerful sunbeams, or the mere taste of his grandson's cordial that he had taken at bedtime, or the fitful vigor that often sports irreverently with aged people, had caused an unfrozen drop of youthfulness, somewhere within him, to expand.

“ Hem ! ahem ! ” quoth the Doctor, hoping with one effort to clear his throat of the dregs of a ten years' cough. “ Matters are not so far gone with me as I thought. I have known

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

mighty sensible men, when only a little age-stricken or otherwise out of sorts, to die of mere faint-heartedness, a great deal sooner than they need."

He shook his silvery head at his own image in the looking-glass, as if to impress the apothegm on that shadowy representative of himself; and, for his part, he determined to pluck up a spirit and live as long as he possibly could, if it were only for the sake of little Pansie, who stood as close to one extremity of human life as her great-grandfather to the other. This child of three years old occupied all the unfossilized portion of Dr. Dolliver's heart. Every other interest that he formerly had, and the entire confraternity of persons whom he once loved, had long ago departed; and the poor Doctor could not follow them, because the grasp of Pansie's baby fingers held him back.

So he crammed a great silver watch into his fob, and drew on a patchwork morning gown of an ancient fashion. Its original material was said to have been the embroidered front of his own wedding waistcoat and the silken skirt of his wife's bridal attire, which his eldest granddaughter had taken from the carved chest of drawers, after poor Bessie, the beloved of his youth, had been half a century in the grave. Throughout many of the intervening years, as the garment got ragged, the spinsters of the old man's family

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

odor of decayed apothecary's stuff, nor gayer neighborhood than that of the adjacent burial ground, where all her relatives, from her great-grandmother downward, lay calling to her, "Pansie, Pansie, it is bedtime!" even in the prime of the summer morn'g. For those dead women folk, especially her mother and the whole row of maiden aunts and grandaunts, could not but be anxious about the child, knowing that little Pansie would be far safer under a tuft of dandelions than if left alone, as she soon must be, in this difficult and deceitful world.

Yet, in spite of the lack of damask roses in her cheeks, she seemed a healthy child, and certainly showed great capacity of energetic movement in the impulsive capers with which she welcomed her venerable progenitor. She shouted out her satisfaction, moreover (as her custom was, having never had any oversensitive auditors about her to tame down her voice), till even the Doctor's dull ears were full of the clamor.

"Pansie, darling," said Dr. Dolliver cheerily, patting her brown hair with his tremulous fingers, "thou hast put some of thine own friskiness into poor old grandfather, this fine morning! Dost know, child, that he came near breaking his neck downstairs at the sound of thy voice? What wouldst thou have done then, little Pansie?"

"Kiss poor grandpapa and make him well!"

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

answered the child, remembering the Doctor's own mode of cure in similar mishaps to herself. "It shall do poor grandpapa good!" she added, putting up her mouth to apply the remedy.

"Ah, little one, thou hast greater faith in thy medicines than ever I had in my drugs," replied the patriarch, with a giggle, surprised and delighted at his own readiness of response. "But the kiss is good for my feeble old heart, Pansie, though it might do little to mend a broken neck; so give grandpapa another dose, and let us to breakfast."

In this merry humor they sat down to the table, great-grandpapa and Pansie side by side, and the kitten, as soon appeared, making a third in the party. First, she showed her mottled head out of Pansie's lap, delicately sipping milk from the child's basin without rebuke; then she took post on the old gentleman's shoulder, purring like a spinning wheel, trying her claws in the wadding of his dressing gown, and still more impressively reminding him of her presence by putting out a paw to intercept a warmed-over morsel of yesterday's chicken on its way to the Doctor's mouth. After skilfully achieving this feat, she scrambled down upon the breakfast table and began to wash her face and hands. Evidently, these companions were all three on intimate terms, as was natural enough, since a great many childish impulses were softly creep-

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

ing back on the simple-minded old man ; inso-much that, if no worldly necessities nor painful infirmity had disturbed him, his remnant of life might have been as cheaply and cheerily enjoyed as the early playtime of the kitten and the child. Old Dr. Dolliver and his great-granddaughter (a ponderous title, which seemed quite to overwhelm the tiny figure of Pansie) had met one another at the two extremities of the life circle : her sunrise served him for a sunset, illuminating his locks of silver and hers of golden brown with a homogeneous shimmer of twinkling light.

Little Pansie was the one earthly creature that inherited a drop of the Dolliver blood. The Doctor's only child, poor Bessie's offspring, had died the better part of a hundred years before, and his grandchildren, a numerous and dimly remembered brood, had vanished along his weary track in their youth, maturity, or incipient age, till, hardly knowing how it had all happened, he found himself tottering onward with an infant's small fingers in his nerveless grasp. So mistily did his dead progeny come and go in the patriarch's decayed recollection, that this solitary child represented for him the successive babyhoods of the many that had gone before. The emotions of his early paternity came back to him. She seemed the baby of a past age oftener than she seemed Pansie. A whole family

Great-grandpapa ana Pansie

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

of grandaunts (one of whom had perished in her cradle, never so mature as Pansie now, another in her virgin bloom, another in autumnal maidenhood, yellow and shrivelled, with vinegar in her blood, and still another, a forlorn widow, whose grief outlasted even its vitality, and grew to be merely a torpid habit, and was saddest then), — all their hitherto forgotten features peeped through the face of the great-grandchild, and their long inaudible voices sobbed, shouted, or laughed in her familiar tones. But it often happened to Dr. Dolliver, while frolicking amid this throng of ghosts, where the one reality looked no more vivid than its shadowy sisters, — it often happened that his eyes filled with tears at a sudden perception of what a sad and poverty-stricken old man he was, already remote from his own generation, and bound to stray further onward as the sole playmate and protector of a child !

As Dr. Dolliver, in spite of his advanced epoch of life, is likely to remain a considerable time longer upon our hands, we deem it expedient to give a brief sketch of his position, in order that the story may get onward with the greater freedom when he rises from the breakfast table. Deeming it a matter of courtesy, we have allowed him the honorary title of Doctor, as did all his townspeople and contemporaries, except, perhaps, one or two formal old physicians, stingy

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

of civil phrases and overjealous of their own professional dignity. Nevertheless, these crusty graduates were technically right in excluding Dr. Dolliver from their fraternity. He had never received the degree of any medical school, nor (save it might be for the cure of a toothache, or a child's rash, or a whitlow on a seamstress's finger, or some such trifling malady) had he ever been even a practitioner of the awful science with which his popular designation connected him. Our old friend, in short, even at his highest social elevation, claimed to be nothing more than an apothecary, and, in these later and far less prosperous days, scarcely so much. Since the death of his last surviving grandson (Pansie's father, whom he had instructed in all the mysteries of his science, and who, being distinguished by an experimental and inventive tendency, was generally believed to have poisoned himself with an infallible panacea of his own distillation), — since that final bereavement, Dr. Dolliver's once pretty flourishing business had lamentably declined. After a few months of unavailing struggle, he found it expedient to take down the Brazen Serpent from the position to which Dr. Swinnerton had originally elevated it, in front of his shop in the main street, and to retire to his private dwelling, situated in a by-lane and on the edge of a burial ground.

This house, as well as the Brazen Serpent,

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

some old medical books, and a drawer full of manuscripts, had come to him by the legacy of Dr. Swinnerton. The dreariness of the locality had been of small importance to our friend in his young manhood, when he first led his fair wife over the threshold, and so long as neither of them had any kinship with the human dust that rose into little hillocks, and still kept accumulating beneath their window. But, too soon afterwards, when poor Bessie herself had gone early to rest there, it is probable that an influence from her grave may have prematurely calmed and depressed her widowed husband, taking away much of the energy from what should have been the most active portion of his life. Thus he never grew rich. His thrifty townsmen used to tell him, that, in any other man's hands, Dr. Swinnerton's Brazen Serpent (meaning, I presume, the inherited credit and good will of that old worthy's trade) would need but ten years' time to transmute its brass into gold. In Dr. Dolliver's keeping, as we have seen, the inauspicious symbol lost the greater part of what superficial gilding it originally had. Matters had not mended with him in more advanced life, after he had deposited a further and further portion of his heart and its affections in each successive one of a long row of kindred graves ; and as he stood over the last of them, holding Pansie by the hand and

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

looking down upon the coffin of his grandson, it is no wonder that the old man wept, partly for those gone before, but not so bitterly as for the little one that stayed behind. Why had not God taken her with the rest? And then, so hopeless as he was, so destitute of possibilities of good, his weary frame, his decrepit bones, his dried-up heart, might have crumbled into dust at once, and have been scattered by the next wind over all the heaps of earth that were akin to him.

This intensity of desolation, however, was of too positive a character to be long sustained by a person of Dr. Dolliver's original gentleness and simplicity, and now so completely tamed by age and misfortune. Even before he turned away from the grave, he grew conscious of a slightly cheering and invigorating effect from the tight grasp of the child's warm little hand. Feeble as he was, she seemed to adopt him willingly for her protector. And the Doctor never afterwards shrank from his duty nor quailed beneath it, but bore himself like a man, striving, amid the sloth of age and the breaking up of intellect, to earn the competency which he had failed to accumulate even in his most vigorous days.

To the extent of securing a present subsistence for Pansie and himself, he was successful. After his son's death, when the Brazen

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

Serpent fell into popular disrepute, a small share of tenacious patronage followed the old man into his retirement. In his prime, he had been allowed to possess more skill than usually fell to the share of a Colonial apothecary, having been regularly apprenticed to Dr. Swinnerton, who, throughout his long practice, was accustomed personally to concoct the medicines which he prescribed and dispensed. It was believed, indeed, that the ancient physician had learned the art at the world-famous drug manufactory of Apothecary's Hall, in London, and, as some people half malignly whispered, had perfected himself under masters more subtle than were to be found even there. Unquestionably, in many critical cases he was known to have employed remedies of mysterious composition and dangerous potency, which, in less skilful hands, would have been more likely to kill than cure. He would willingly, it is said, have taught his apprentice the secrets of these prescriptions, but the latter, being of a timid character and delicate conscience, had shrunk from acquaintance with them. It was probably as the result of the same scrupulosity that Dr. Dolliver had always declined to enter the medical profession, in which his old instructor had set him such heroic examples of adventurous dealing with matters of life and death. Nevertheless, the aromatic fragrance, so to speak, of

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

the learned Swinnerton's reputation had clung to our friend through life ; and there were elaborate preparations in the pharmacopœia of that day, requiring such minute skill and conscientious fidelity in the concocter that the physicians were still glad to confide them to one in whom these qualities were so evident.

Moreover, the grandmothers of the community were kind to him, and mindful of his perfumes, his rose water, his cosmetics, tooth powders, pomanders, and pomades, the scented memory of which lingered about their toilet tables, or came faintly back from the days when they were beautiful. Among this class of customers there was still a demand for certain comfortable little nostrums (delicately sweet and pungent to the taste, cheering to the spirits, and fragrant in the breath), the proper distillation of which was the airiest secret that the mystic Swinnerton had left behind him. And, besides, these old ladies had always liked the manners of Dr. Dolliver, and used to speak of his gentle courtesy behind the counter as having positively been something to admire ; though of later years, an unrefined and almost rustic simplicity, such as belonged to his humble ancestors, appeared to have taken possession of him, as it often does of prettily mannered men in their late decay.

But it resulted from all these favorable circum-

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

stances that the Doctor's marble mortar, though worn with long service and considerably damaged by a crack that pervaded it, continued to keep up an occasional intimacy with the pestle ; and he still weighed drachms and scruples in his delicate scales, though it seemed impossible, dealing with such minute quantities, that his tremulous fingers should not put in too little or too much, leaving out life with the deficiency, or spilling in death with the surplus. To say the truth, his stanchest friends were beginning to think that Dr. Dolliver's fits of absence (when his mind appeared absolutely to depart from him, while his frail old body worked on mechanically) rendered him not quite trustworthy without a close supervision of his proceedings. It was impossible, however, to convince the aged apothecary of the necessity for such vigilance ; and if anything could stir up his gentle temper to wrath, or, as oftener happened, to tears, it was the attempt (which he was marvellously quick to detect) thus to interfere with his long familiar business.

The public, meanwhile, ceasing to regard Dr. Dolliver in his professional aspect, had begun to take an interest in him as perhaps their oldest fellow citizen. It was he that remembered the Great Fire and the Great Snow, and that had been a grown-up stripling at the terrible epoch of Witch Times, and a child just breeched at

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

the breaking out of King Philip's Indian War. He, too, in his schoolboy days, had received a benediction from the patriarchal Governor Bradstreet, and thus could boast (somewhat as Bishops do of their unbroken succession from the Apostles) of a transmitted blessing from the whole company of sainted Pilgrims, among whom the venerable magistrate had been an honored companion. Viewing their townsman in this respect, the people revoked the courteous Doctorate with which they had heretofore decorated him, and now knew him most familiarly as Grandsir Dolliver. His white head, his Puritan band, his threadbare garb (the fashion of which he had ceased to change, half a century ago), his gold-headed staff, that had been Dr. Swinnerton's, his shrunk, frosty figure, and its feeble movement, — all these characteristics had a wholeness and permanence in the public recognition, like the meeting-house steeple or the town pump. All the younger portion of the inhabitants unconsciously ascribed a sort of aged immortality to Grandsir Dolliver's infirm and reverend presence. They fancied that he had been born old (at least, I remember entertaining some such notions about age-stricken people, when I myself was young), and that he could the better tolerate his aches and incommodities, his dull ears and dim eyes, his remoteness from human intercourse within the crust of indurated

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

years, the cold temperature that kept him always shivering and sad, the heavy burden that invisibly bent down his shoulders, — that all these intolerable things might bring a kind of enjoyment to Grandsir Dolliver, as the lifelong conditions of his peculiar existence.

But, alas! it was a terrible mistake. This weight of years had a perennial novelty for the poor sufferer. He never grew accustomed to it, but, long as he had now borne the fretful torpor of his waning life, and patient as he seemed, he still retained an inward consciousness that these stiffened shoulders, these quailing knees, this cloudiness of sight and brain, this confused forgetfulness of men and affairs, were troublesome accidents that did not really belong to him. He possibly cherished a half-recognized idea that they might pass away. Youth, however eclipsed for a season, is undoubtedly the proper, permanent, and genuine condition of man; and if we look closely into this dreary delusion of growing old, we shall find that it never absolutely succeeds in laying hold of our innermost convictions. A sombre garment, woven of life's unrealities, has muffled us from our true self, but within it smiles the young man whom we knew; the ashes of many perishable things have fallen upon our youthful fire, but beneath them lurk the seeds of inextinguishable flame. So powerful is this instinctive faith, that men of simple modes of

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

character are prone to antedate its consummation. And thus it happened with poor Grandsir Dolliver, who often awoke from an old man's fitful sleep with a sense that his senile predicament was but a dream of the past night; and hobbling hastily across the cold floor to the looking-glass, he would be grievously disappointed at beholding the white hair, the wrinkles and furrows, the ashen visage and bent form, the melancholy mask of Age, in which, as he now remembered, some strange and sad enchantment had involved him for years gone by!

To other eyes than his own, however, the shrivelled old gentleman looked as if there were little hope of his throwing off this too artfully wrought disguise, until, at no distant day, his stooping figure should be straightened out, his hoary locks be smoothed over his brows, and his much-enduring bones be laid safely away, with a green coverlet spread over them, beside his Bessie, who doubtless would recognize her youthful companion in spite of his ugly garniture of decay. He longed to be gazed at by the loving eyes now closed; he shrank from the hard stare of them that loved him not. Walking the streets seldom and reluctantly, he felt a dreary impulse to elude the people's observation, as if with a sense that he had gone irrevocably out of fashion, and broken his connecting links with the network of human life; or else

SCENE FROM DOLLIVER ROMANCE

it was that nightmare feeling which we sometimes have in dreams, when we seem to find ourselves wandering through a crowded avenue, with the noonday sun upon us, in some wild extravagance of dress or nudity. He was conscious of estrangement from his townspeople, but did not always know how nor wherefore, nor why he should be thus groping through the twilight mist in solitude. If they spoke loudly to him, with cheery voices, the greeting translated itself faintly and mournfully to his ears; if they shook him by the hand, it was as if a thick, insensible glove absorbed the kindly pressure and the warmth. When little Pansie was the companion of his walk, her childish gayety and freedom did not avail to bring him into closer relationship with men, but seemed to follow him into that region of indefinable remoteness, that dismal Fairyland of aged fancy, into which old Grand-sir Dolliver had so strangely crept away.

Yet there were moments, as many persons had noticed, when the great-grandpapa would suddenly take stronger hues of life. It was as if his faded figure had been colored over anew, or at least, as he and Pansie moved along the street, as if a sunbeam had fallen across him, instead of the gray gloom of an instant before. His chilled sensibilities had probably been touched and quickened by the warm contiguity of his little companion through the medium of her hand, as

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

it stirred within his own, or some inflection of her voice that set his memory ringing and chiming with forgotten sounds. While that music lasted, the old man was alive and happy. And there were seasons, it might be, happier than even these, when Pansie had been kissed and put to bed, and Grandsir Dolliver sat by his fireside gazing in among the massive coals, and absorbing their glow into those cavernous abysses with which all men communicate. Hence come angels or fiends into our twilight musings, according as we may have peopled them in bygone years. Over our friend's face, in the rosy flicker of the fire gleam, stole an expression of repose and perfect trust that made him as beautiful to look at, in his high-backed chair, as the child Pansie on her pillow ; and sometimes the spirits that were watching him beheld a calm surprise draw slowly over his features and brighten into joy, yet not so vividly as to break his evening quietude. The gate of heaven had been kindly left ajar, that this forlorn old creature might catch a glimpse within. All the night afterwards he would be semi-conscious of an intangible bliss diffused through the fitful lapses of an old man's slumber, and would awake, at early dawn, with a faint thrilling of the heartstrings, as if there had been music just now wandering over them.

ANOTHER SCENE FROM THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE ¹

WE may now suppose Grandsir Dolliver to have finished his breakfast, with a better appetite and sharper perception of the qualities of his food than he has generally felt of late years, whether it were due to old Martha's cookery or to the cordial of the night before. Little Pansie had also made an end of her bread and milk with entire satisfaction, and afterwards nibbled a crust, greatly enjoying its resistance to her little white teeth.

How this child came by the odd name of Pansie, and whether it was really her baptismal name, I have not ascertained. More probably it was one of those pet appellations that grow out of a child's character, or out of some keen thrill of affection in the parents, an unsought-for and unconscious felicity, a kind of revelation, teaching them the true name by which the child's guardian angel would know it, — a name with playfulness and love in it, that we often observe to supersede, in the practice of those

¹ This scene was not revised by the author, but is printed from his first draught.

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

who love the child best, the name that they carefully selected, and caused the clergyman to plaster indelibly on the poor little forehead at the font, — the love name, whereby, if the child lives, the parents know it in their hearts, or by which, if it dies, God seems to have called it away, leaving the sound lingering faintly and sweetly through the house. In Pansie's case, it may have been a certain pensiveness which was sometimes seen under her childish frolic, and so translated itself into French (*pensée*), her mother having been of Acadian kin; or, quite as probably, it alluded merely to the color of her eyes, which, in some lights, were very like the dark petals of a tuft of pansies in the Doctor's garden. It might well be, indeed, on account of the suggested pensiveness; for the child's gayety had no example to sustain it, no sympathy of other children or grown people, — and her melancholy, had it been so dark a feeling, was but the shadow of the house and of the old man. If brighter sunshine came, she would brighten with it. This morning, surely, as the three companions, Pansie, puss, and Grandsir Dolliver, emerged from the shadow of the house into the small adjoining enclosure, they seemed all frolicsome alike.

The Doctor, however, was intent over something that had reference to his lifelong business of drugs. This little spot was the place where

ANOTHER SCENE

he was wont to cultivate a variety of herbs supposed to be endowed with medicinal virtue. Some of them had been long known in the pharmacopœia of the Old World ; and others, in the early days of the country, had been adopted by the first settlers from the Indian medicine men, though with fear and even contrition, because these wild doctors were supposed to draw their pharmaceutic knowledge from no gracious source, the Black Man himself being the principal professor in their medical school. From his own experience, however, Dr. Dolliver had long since doubted, though he was not bold enough quite to come to the conclusion, that Indian shrubs, and the remedies prepared from them, were much less per'ious than those so freely used in European practice, and singularly apt to be followed by results quite as propitious. Into such heterodoxy our friend was the more liable to fall, because it had been taught him early in life by his old master, Dr. Swinnerton, who, at those not infrequent times when he indulged a certain unhappy predilection for strong waters, had been accustomed to inveigh in terms of the most cynical contempt and coarsest ridicule against the practice by which he lived, and, as he affirmed, inflicted death on his fellow men. Our old apothecary, though too loyal to the learned profession with which he was connected fully to believe this bitter judgment, even when

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

pronounced by his revered master, was still so far influenced that his conscience was possibly a little easier when making a preparation from forest herbs and roots than in the concoction of half a score of nauseous poisons into a single elaborate drug, as the fashion of that day was.

But there were shrubs in the garden of which he had never ventured to make a medical use, nor, indeed, did he know their virtue, although from year to year he had tended and fertilized, weeded and pruned them, with something like religious care. They were of the rarest character, and had been planted by the learned and famous Dr. Swinnerton, who, on his deathbed, when he left his dwelling and all his abstruse manuscripts to his favorite pupil, had particularly directed his attention to this row of shrubs. They had been collected by himself from remote countries, and had the poignancy of torrid climes in them ; and he told him, that, properly used, they would be worth all the rest of the legacy a hundredfold. As the apothecary, however, found the manuscripts, in which he conjectured there was a treatise on the subject of these shrubs, mostly illegible, and quite beyond his comprehension in such passages as he succeeded in puzzling out (partly, perhaps, owing to his very imperfect knowledge of Latin, in which language they were written), he had never derived

ANOTHER SCENE

from them any of the promised benefit. And, to say the truth, remembering that Dr. Swinnerton himself never appeared to triturate or decoct or do anything else with the mysterious herbs, our old friend was inclined to imagine the weighty commendation of their virtues to have been the idly solemn utterance of mental aberration at the hour of death. So, with the integrity that belonged to his character, he had nurtured them as tenderly as was possible in the ungenial climate and soil of New England, putting some of them into pots for the winter ; but they had rather dwindled than flourished, and he had reaped no harvests from them, nor observed them with any degree of scientific interest.

His grandson, however, while yet a school-boy, had listened to the old man's legend of the miraculous virtues of these plants ; and it took so firm a hold of his mind, that the row of outlandish vegetables seemed rooted in it, and certainly flourished there with richer luxuriance than in the soil where they actually grew. The story, acting thus early upon his imagination, may be said to have influenced his brief career in life, and, perchance, brought about its early close. The young man, in the opinion of competent judges, was endowed with remarkable abilities, and according to the rumor of the people had wonderful gifts, which were proved by the cures he had

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

wrought with remedies of his own invention. His talents lay in the direction of scientific analysis and inventive combination of chemical powers. While under the pupilage of his grandfather, his progress had rapidly gone quite beyond his instructor's hope, — leaving him even to tremble at the audacity with which he overturned and invented theories, and to wonder at the depth at which he wrought beneath the superficialness and mock mystery of the medical science of those days, like a miner sinking his shaft and running a hideous peril of the earth caving in above him. Especially did he devote himself to these plants ; and under his care they had thriven beyond all former precedent, bursting into luxuriance of bloom, and most of them bearing beautiful flowers, which, however, in two or three instances, had the sort of natural repulsiveness that the serpent has in its beauty, compelled against its will, as it were, to warn the beholder of an unrevealed danger. The young man had long ago, it must be added, demanded of his grandfather the documents included in the legacy of Professor Swinnerton, and had spent days and nights upon them, growing pale over their mystic lore, which seemed the fruit not merely of the Professor's own labors, but of those of more ancient sages than he ; and often a whole volume seemed to be compressed within the limits of a few lines of crabbed manuscript,

ANOTHER SCENE

judging from the time which it cost even the quick-minded student to decipher them.

Meantime these abstruse investigations had not wrought such disastrous effects as might have been feared, in causing Edward Dolliver to neglect the humble trade, the conduct of which his grandfather had now relinquished almost entirely into his hands. On the contrary, with the mere side results of his study, or what may be called the chips and shavings of his real work, he created a prosperity quite beyond anything that his simple-minded predecessor had ever hoped for, even at the most sanguine epoch of his life. The young man's adventurous endowments were miraculously alive, and connecting themselves with his remarkable ability for solid research, and perhaps his conscience being as yet imperfectly developed (as it sometimes lies dormant in the young), he spared not to produce compounds which, if the names were anywise to be trusted, would supersede all other remedies, and speedily render any medicine a needless thing, making the trade of apothecary an untenable one, and the title of Doctor obsolete. Whether there was real efficacy in these nostrums, and whether their author himself had faith in them, is more than can safely be said; but, at all events, the public believed in them, and thronged to the old and dim sign of the Brazen Serpent, which, though hitherto familiar

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

to them and their forefathers, now seemed to shine with auspicious lustre, as if its old Scriptural virtues were renewed. If any faith was to be put in human testimony, many marvellous cures were really performed, the fame of which spread far and wide, and caused demands for these medicines to come in from places far beyond the precincts of the little town. Our old apothecary, now degraded by the overshadowing influence of his grandson's character to a position not much above that of a shopboy, stood behind the counter with a face sad and distrustful, and yet with an odd kind of fitful excitement in it, as if he would have liked to enjoy this new prosperity, had he dared. Then his venerable figure was to be seen dispensing these questionable compounds by the single bottle and by the dozen, wronging his simple conscience as he dealt out what he feared was trash or worse, shrinking from the reproachful eyes of every ancient physician who might chance to be passing by, but withal examining closely the silver, or the New England coarsely printed bills, which he took in payment, as if apprehensive that the delusive character of the commodity which he sold might be balanced by equal counterfeiting in the money received, or as if his faith in all things were shaken.

Is it not possible that this gifted young man had indeed found out those remedies which

ANOTHER SCENE

Nature has provided and laid away for the cure of every ill?

The disastrous termination of the most brilliant epoch that ever came to the Brazen Serpent must be told in a few words. One night, Edward Dolliver's young wife awoke, and, seeing the gray dawn creeping into the chamber, while her husband, it should seem, was still engaged in his laboratory, arose in her nightdress, and went to the door of the room to put in her gentle remonstrance against such labor. There she found him dead, — sunk down out of his chair upon the hearth, where were some ashes, apparently of burnt manuscripts, which appeared to comprise most of those included in Dr. Swinnerton's legacy, though one or two had fallen near the heap, and lay merely scorched beside it. It seemed as if he had thrown them into the fire, under a sudden impulse, in a great hurry and passion. It may be that he had come to the perception of something fatally false and deceptive in the successes which he had appeared to win, and was too proud and too conscientious to survive it. Doctors were called in, but had no power to revive him. An inquest was held, at which the jury, under the instruction, perhaps, of those same revengeful doctors, expressed the opinion that the poor young man, being given to strange contrivances with poisonous drugs, had died by incautiously tasting them

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

himself. This verdict, and the terrible event itself, at once deprived the medicines of all their popularity ; and the poor old apothecary was no longer under any necessity of disturbing his conscience by selling them. They at once lost their repute, and ceased to be in any demand. In the few instances in which they were tried, the experiment was followed by no good results ; and even those individuals who had fancied themselves cured, and had been loudest in spreading the praises of these beneficent compounds, now, as if for the utter demolition of the poor youth's credit, suffered under a recurrence of the worst symptoms, and, in more than one case, perished miserably : insomuch (for the days of witchcraft were still within the memory of living men and women) it was the general opinion that Satan had been personally concerned in this affliction, and that the Brazen Serpent, so long honored among them, was really the type of his subtle malevolence and perfect iniquity. It was rumored even that all preparations that came from the shop were harmful: that teeth decayed that had been made pearly white by the use of the young chemist's dentifrice ; that cheeks were freckled that had been changed to damask roses by his cosmetics ; that hair turned gray or fell off that had become black, glossy, and luxuriant from the application of his mixtures ; that breath which his drugs had

ANOTHER SCENE

sweetened had now a sulphurous smell. Moreover, all the money heretofore amassed by the sale of them had been exhausted by Edward Dolliver in his lavish expenditure for the processes of his study ; and nothing was left for Pansie, except a few valueless and unsalable bottles of medicine, and one or two others, perhaps more recondite than their inventor had seen fit to offer to the public. Little Pansie's mother lived but a short time after the shock of the terrible catastrophe ; and, as we began our story with saying, she was left with no better guardianship or support than might be found in the efforts of a long superannuated man.

Nothing short of the simplicity, integrity, and piety of Grandsir Dolliver's character, known and acknowledged as far back as the oldest inhabitants remembered anything, and inevitably discoverable by the dullest and most prejudiced observers, in all its natural manifestations, could have protected him in still creeping about the streets. So far as he was personally concerned, however, all bitterness and suspicion had speedily passed away ; and there remained still the careless and neglectful good will, and the prescriptive reverence, not altogether reverential, which the world heedlessly awards to the unfortunate individual who outlives his generation.

And now that we have shown the reader sufficiently, or at least to the best of our knowledge,

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

and perhaps at tedious length, what was the present position of Grandsir Dolliver, we may let our story pass onward, though at such a pace as suits the feeble gait of an old man.

The peculiarly brisk sensation of this morning, to which we have more than once alluded, enabled the Doctor to toil pretty vigorously at his medicinal herbs, — his catnip, his vervain, and the like ; but he did not turn his attention to the row of mystic plants, with which so much of trouble and sorrow either was, or appeared to be, connected. In truth, his old soul was sick of them, and their very fragrance, which the warm sunshine made strongly perceptible, was odious to his nostrils. But the spicy, homelike scent of his other herbs, the English simples, was grateful to him, and so was the earth smell, as he turned up the soil about their roots, and eagerly snuffed it in. Little Pansie, on the other hand, perhaps scandalized at great-grandpapa's neglect of the prettiest plants in his garden, resolved to do her small utmost towards balancing his injustice ; so with an old shingle, fallen from the roof, which she had appropriated as her agricultural tool, she began to dig about them, pulling up the weeds, as she saw grandpapa doing. The kitten, too, with a look of elfish sagacity, lent her assistance, plying her paws with vast haste and efficiency at the roots of one of the shrubs. This particular one was much smaller than the

ANOTHER SCENE

rest, perhaps because it was a native of the torrid zone, and required greater care than the others to make it flourish; so that, shrivelled, cankered, and scarcely showing a green leaf, both Pansie and the kitten probably mistook it for a weed. After their joint efforts had made a pretty big trench about it, the little girl seized the shrub with both hands, bestriding it with her plump little legs, and giving so vigorous a pull, that, long accustomed to be transplanted annually, it came up by the roots, and little Pansie came down in a sitting posture, making a broad impress on the soft earth. "See, see, Doctor!" cries Pansie, comically enough giving him his title of courtesy, — "look, grandpapa, the big, naughty weed!"

Now the Doctor had at once a peculiar dread and a peculiar value for this identical shrub, both because his grandson's investigations had been applied more ardently to it than to all the rest, and because it was associated in his mind with an ancient and sad recollection. For he had never forgotten that his wife, the early lost, had once taken a fancy to wear its flowers, day after day, through the whole season of their bloom, in her bosom, where they glowed like a gem, and deepened her somewhat pallid beauty with a richness never before seen in it. At least such was the effect which this tropical flower imparted to the beloved form in his memory, and

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

Thus it somehow both brightened and wronged her. This had happened not long before her death ; and whenever, in the subsequent years, this plant had brought its annual flower, it had proved a kind of talisman to bring up the image of Bessie, radiant with this glow that did not really belong to her naturally passive beauty, quickly interchanging with another image of her form, with the snow of death on cheek and forehead. This reminiscence had remained among the things of which the Doctor was always conscious, but had never breathed a word, through the whole of his long life, — a sprig of sensibility that perhaps helped to keep him tenderer and purer than other men, who entertain no such follies. And the sight of the shrub often brought back the faint, golden gleam of her hair, as if her spirit were in the sunlights of the garden, quivering into view and out of it. And therefore, when he saw what Pansie had done, he sent forth a strange, inarticulate, hoarse, tremulous exclamation, a sort of aged and decrepit cry of mingled emotion. “Naughty Pansie, to pull up grandpapa’s flower !” said he, as soon as he could speak. “Poison, Pansie, poison ! Fling it away, child !”

And dropping his spade, the old gentleman scrambled towards the little girl as quickly as his rusty joints would let him, — while Pansie, as apprehensive and quick of motion as a fawn,

ANOTHER SCENE

started up with a shriek of mirth and fear to escape him. It so happened that the garden gate was ajar; and a puff of wind blowing it wide open, she escaped through this fortuitous avenue, followed by great-grandpapa and the kitten.

“Stop, naughty Pansie, stop!” shouted our old friend. “You will tumble into the grave!” The kitten, with the singular sensitiveness that seems to affect it at every kind of excitement, was now on her back.

And, indeed, this portentous warning was better grounded and had a more literal meaning than might be supposed; for the swinging gate communicated with the burial ground, and almost directly in little Pansie’s track there was a newly dug grave, ready to receive its tenant that afternoon. Pansie, however, fled onward with outstretched arms, half in fear, half in fun, plying her round little legs with wonderful promptitude, as if to escape Time or Death, in the person of Grandsir Dolliver, and happily avoiding the ominous pitfall that lies in every person’s path, till, hearing a groan from her pursuer, she looked over her shoulder, and saw that poor grandpapa had stumbled over one of the many hillocks. She then suddenly wrinkled up her little visage, and sent forth a full-breathed roar of sympathy and alarm.

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

"Grandpapa has broken his neck now!" cried little Pansie, amid her sobs.

"Kiss grandpapa, and make it well, then," said the old gentleman, recollecting her remedy, and scrambling up more readily than could be expected. "Well," he murmured to himself, "a hair's breadth more, and I should have been tumbled into yonder grave. Poor little Pansie! what wouldst thou have done then?"

"Make the grass grow over grandpapa," answered Pansie, laughing up in his face.

"Poh, poh, child, that is not a pretty thing to say," said grandpapa pettishly and disappointed, as people are apt to be when they try to calculate on the fitful sympathies of childhood. "Come, you must go in to old Martha now."

The poor old gentleman was in the more haste to leave the spot because he found himself standing right in front of his own peculiar row of gravestones, consisting of eight or nine slabs of slate, adorned with carved borders rather rudely cut, and the earliest one, that of his Bessie, bending aslant, because the frost of so many winters had slowly undermined it. Over one grave of the row, that of his gifted grandson, there was no memorial. He felt a strange repugnance, stronger than he had ever felt before, to linger by these graves, and had none of the tender sorrow, mingled with high and tender hopes, that had sometimes made it seem good to him to be

ANOTHER SCENE

there. Such moods, perhaps, often come to the aged, when the hardened earth crust over their souls shuts them out from spiritual influences.

Taking the child by the hand, — her little effervescence of infantile fun having passed into a downcast humor, though not well knowing as yet what a dusky cloud of disheartening fancies arose from these green hillocks, — he went heavily toward the garden gate. Close to its threshold, so that one who was issuing forth or entering must needs step upon it or over it, lay a small flat stone, deeply imbedded in the ground, and partly covered with grass, inscribed with the name of “Dr. John Swinnerton, Physician.”

“Ay,” said the old man, as the well-remembered figure of his ancient instructor seemed to rise before him in his grave-apparel, with beard and gold-headed cane, black velvet doublet and cloak, “here lies a man who, as people have thought, had it in his power to avoid the grave! He had no little grandchild to tease him. He had the choice to die, and chose it.”

So the old gentleman led Pansie over the stone, and carefully closed the gate; and, as it happened, he forgot the uprooted shrub, which Pansie, as she ran, had flung away, and which had fallen into the open grave; and when the funeral came that afternoon, the coffin was let down upon it, so that its bright, inauspicious flower never bloomed again.

ANOTHER FRAGMENT OF THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

BE secret!" and he kept his stern eye fixed upon him, as the coach began to move.

"Be secret!" repeated the apothecary. "I know not any secret that he has confided to me thus far, and as for his nonsense (as I will be bold to style it now he is gone) about a medicine of long life, it is a thing I forget in spite of myself, so very empty and trashy it is. I wonder, by the bye, that it never came into my head to give the Colonel a dose of the cordial whereof I partook last night. I have no faith that it is a valuable medicine, — little or none, — and yet there has been an unwonted briskness in me all the morning."

Then a simple joy broke over his face — a flickering sunbeam among his wrinkles — as he heard the laughter of the little girl, who was running rampant with a kitten in the kitchen.

"Pansie! Pansie!" cackled he, "grandpapa has sent away the ugly man now. Come, let us have a frolic in the garden."

And he whispered to himself again, "That is a cordial yonder, and I will take it according

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

to the prescription, knowing all the ingredients." Then, after a moment's thought, he added, "All, save one."

So, as he had declared to himself his intention, that night, when little Pansie had long been asleep, and his small household was in bed, and most of the quiet, old-fashioned townsfolk likewise, this good apothecary went into his laboratory, and took out of a cupboard in the wall a certain ancient-looking bottle, which was cased over with a network of what seemed to be woven silver, like the wicker-woven bottles of our days. He had previously provided a goblet of pure water. Before opening the bottle, however, he seemed to hesitate, and pondered and babbled to himself; having long since come to that period of life when the bodily frame, having lost much of its value, is more tenderly cared for than when it was a perfect and inestimable machine.

"I triturated, I infused, I distilled it myself in these very rooms, and know it — know it all — all the ingredients, save one. They are common things enough — comfortable things — some of them a little queer — one or two that folks have a prejudice against — and then there is that one thing that I don't know. It is foolish in me to be dallying with such a mess, which I thought was a piece of quackery, while that strange visitor bade me do it, — and yet,

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

what a strength has come from it ! He said it was a rare cordial, and, methinks, it has brightened up my weary life all day, so that Pansie has found me the fitter playmate. And then the dose, — it is so absurdly small ! I will try it again.”

He took the silver stopple from the bottle, and with a practised hand, tremulous as it was with age, so that one would have thought it must have shaken the liquor into a perfect shower of misapplied drops, he dropped — I have heard it said — only one single drop into the goblet of water. It fell into it with a dazzling brightness, like a spark of ruby flame, and subtly diffusing itself through the whole body of water, turned it to a rosy hue of great brilliancy. He held it up between his eyes and the light, and seemed to admire and wonder at it.

“ It is very odd,” said he, “ that such a pure, bright liquor should have come out of a parcel of weeds that mingled their juices heré. The thing is a folly, — it is one of those compositions in which the chemists — the cabalists, perhaps — used to combine what they thought the virtues of many plants, thinking that something would result in the whole, which was not in either of them, and a new efficacy be created. Whereas, it has been the teaching of my experience that one virtue counteracts another, and is the enemy of it. I never believed the former

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

theory, even when that strange madman bade me do it. And what a thick, turbid matter it was, until that last ingredient, — that powder which he put in with his own hand ! Had he let me see it, I would first have analyzed it, and discovered its component parts. The man was mad, undoubtedly, and this may have been poison. But its effect is good. Poh ! I will taste again, because of this weak, agued, miserable state of mine ; though it is a shame in me, a man of decent skill in my way, to believe in a quack's nostrum. But it is a comfortable kind of thing."

Meantime, that single drop (for good Dr. Dolliver had immediately put a stopper into the bottle) diffused a sweet odor through the chamber, so that the ordinary fragrances and scents of apothecaries' stuff seemed to be controlled and influenced by it, and its bright potency also dispelled a certain dimness of the antiquated room.

The Doctor, at the pressure of a great need, had given incredible pains to the manufacture of this medicine ; so that, reckoning the pains rather than the ingredients (all except one, of which he was not able to estimate the cost nor value), it was really worth its weight in gold. And, as it happened, he had bestowed upon it the hard labor of his poor life, and the time that was necessary for the support of his family, without return ; for the customers, after playing

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

off this cruel joke upon the old man, had never come back ; and now, for seven years, the bottle had stood in a corner of the cupboard. To be sure, the silver-cased bottle was worth a trifle for its silver, and still more, perhaps, as an antiquarian knickknack. But, all things considered, the honest and simple apothecary thought that he might make free with the liquid to such small extent as was necessary for himself. And there had been something in the concoction that had struck him ; and he had been fast breaking lately ; and so, in the dreary fantasy and lonely recklessness of his old age, he had suddenly bethought himself of this medicine (cordial, as the strange man called it, which had come to him by long inheritance in his family) and he had determined to try it. And again, as the night before, he took out the receipt — a roll of antique parchment, out of which, provokingly, one fold had been lost — and put on his spectacles to puzzle out the passage.

Guttam unicum in aquam puram, two gills. “ If the Colonel should hear of this,” said Dr. Dolliver, “ he might fancy it his nostrum of long life, and insist on having the bottle for his own use. The foolish, fierce old gentleman ! He has grown very earthly, of late, else he would not desire such a thing. And a strong desire it must be to make him feel it desirable. For my part, I only wish for something that,

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

for a short time, may clear my eyes, so that I may see little Pansie's beauty, and quicken my ears, that I may hear her sweet voice, and give me nerve, while God keeps me here, that I may live longer to earn bread for dear Pansie. She provided for, I would gladly lie down yonder with Bessie and our children. Ah! the vanity of desiring lengthened days! — There! — I have drunk it, and methinks its final, subtle flavor hath strange potency in it."

The old man shivered a little, as those shiver who have just swallowed good liquor, while it is permeating their vitals. Yet he seemed to be in a pleasant state of feeling, and, as was frequently the case with this simple soul, in a devout frame of mind. He read a chapter in the Bible, and said his prayers for Pansie and himself, before he went to bed, and had much better sleep than usually comes to people of his advanced age; for, at that period, sleep is diffused through their wakefulness, and a dim and tiresome half-perception through their sleep, so that the only result is weariness.

Nothing very extraordinary happened to Dr. Dolliver or his small household for some time afterwards. He was favored with a comfortable winter, and thanked Heaven for it, and put it to a good use (at least he intended it so) by concocting drugs; which perhaps did a little towards peopling the graveyard, into which his

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

windows looked ; but that was neither his purpose nor his fault. None of the sleepers, at all events, interrupted their slumbers to upbraid him. He had done according to his own artless conscience and the recipes of licensed physicians, and he looked no further, but pounded, triturated, infused, made electuaries, boluses, juleps, or whatever he termed his productions, with skill and diligence, thanking Heaven that he was spared to do so, when his contemporaries generally were getting incapable of similar efforts. It struck him with some surprise, but much gratitude to Providence, that his sight seemed to be growing rather better than worse. He certainly could read the crabbed handwriting and hieroglyphics of the physicians with more readiness than he could a year earlier. But he had been originally near-sighted, with large, projecting eyes ; and near-sighted eyes always seem to get a new lease of light as the years go on. One thing was perceptible about the Doctor's eyes, not only to himself in the glass, but to everybody else ; namely, that they had an unaccustomed gleaming brightness in them ; not so very bright, either, but yet so much so that little Pansie noticed it, and sometimes, in her playful, roguish way, climbed up into his lap, and put both her small palms over them ; telling grandpapa that he had stolen somebody else's eyes, and given away his own, and that she

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

liked his old ones better. The poor old Doctor did his best to smile through his eyes, and so to reconcile Pansie to their brightness; but still she continually made the same silly remonstrance, so that he was fain to put on a pair of green spectacles when he was going to play with Pansie, or took her on his knee. Nay, if he looked at her, as had always been his custom, after she was asleep, in order to see that all was well with her, the little child would put up her hands, as if he held a light that was flashing on her eyeballs; and unless he turned away his gaze quickly, she would wake up in a fit of crying.

On the whole, the apothecary had as comfortable a time as a man of his years could expect. The air of the house and of the old graveyard seemed to suit him. What so seldom happens in man's advancing age, his night's rest did him good, whereas, generally, an old man wakes up ten times as nervous and dispirited as he went to bed, just as if, during his sleep, he had been working harder than ever he did in the daytime. It had been so with the Doctor himself till within a few months. To be sure, he had latterly begun to practise various rules of diet and exercise, which commended themselves to his approbation. He sawed some of his own firewood, and fancied that, as was reasonable, it fatigued him less day by day. He took walks

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

with Pansie, and though, of course, her little footsteps, treading on the elastic air of childhood, far outstripped his own, still the old man knew that he was not beyond the recuperative period of life, and that exercise out of doors and proper food can do somewhat towards retarding the approach of age. He was inclined, also, to impute much good effect to a daily dose of Santa Cruz rum (a liquor much in vogue in that day), which he was now in the habit of quaffing at the meridian hour. All through the Doctor's life he had eschewed strong spirits. "But after seventy," quoth old Dr. Dolliver, "a man is all the better in head and stomach for a little stimulus;" and it certainly seemed so in his case. Likewise, I know not precisely how often, but complying punctiliously with the recipe, as an apothecary naturally would, he took his drop of the mysterious cordial.

He was inclined, however, to impute little or no efficacy to this, and to laugh at himself for having ever thought otherwise. The dose was so very minute! and he had never been sensible of any remarkable effect on taking it, after all. A genial warmth, he sometimes fancied, diffused itself throughout him, and perhaps continued during the next day. A quiet and refreshing night's rest followed, and alacritous waking in the morning; but all this was far more probably owing, as has been already hinted,

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

to excellent and well-considered habits of diet and exercise. Nevertheless, he still continued the cordial with tolerable regularity, — the more, because on one or two occasions, happening to omit it, it so chanced that he slept wretchedly, and awoke in strange aches and pains, torpors, nervousness, shaking of the hands, blearedness of sight, lowness of spirits, and other ills, as is the misfortune of some old men, who are often threatened by a thousand evil symptoms that come to nothing, foreboding no particular disorder, and passing away as unsatisfactorily as they come. At another time, he took two or three drops at once, and was alarmingly feverish in consequence. Yet it was very true, that the feverish symptoms were pretty sure to disappear on his renewal of the medicine. “Still it could not be that,” thought the old man, a hater of empiricism (in which, however, is contained all hope for man), and disinclined to believe in anything that was not according to rule and art. And then, as aforesaid, the dose was so ridiculously small !

Sometimes, however, he took, half laughingly, another view of it, and felt disposed to think that chance might really have thrown in his way a very remarkable mixture, by which, if it had happened to him earlier in life, he might have amassed a larger fortune, and might even have raked together such a competency as would have

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

prevented his feeling much uneasiness about the future of little Pansie. Feeling as strong as he did nowadays, he might reasonably count upon ten years more of life, and in that time the precious liquor might be exchanged for much gold. "Let us see!" quoth he; "by what attractive name shall it be advertised? 'The old man's cordial'? That promises too little. Poh, poh! I would stain my honesty, my fair reputation, the accumulation of a lifetime, and befool my neighbor and the public, by any name that would make them imagine I had found that ridiculous talisman that the alchemists have sought. The old man's cordial, — that is best. And five shillings sterling the bottle. That surely were not too costly, and would give the medicine a better reputation and higher vogue (so foolish is the world) than if I were to put it lower. I will think further of this. But pshaw, pshaw!"

"What is the matter, grandpapa?" said little Pansie, who had stood by him, wishing to speak to him at least a minute, but had been deterred by his absorption; "why do you say 'Pshaw'?"

"Pshaw!" repeated grandpapa, "there is one ingredient that I don't know."

So this very hopeful design was necessarily given up, but that it had occurred to Dr. Dolliver was perhaps a token that his mind was in a very vigorous state; for it had been noted of him through life, that he had little enterprise,

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

little activity, and that, for the want of these things, his very considerable skill in his art had been almost thrown away, as regarded his private affairs, when it might easily have led him to fortune. Whereas, here in his extreme age, he had first bethought himself of a way to grow rich. Sometimes this latter spring causes — as blossoms come on the autumnal tree — a spurt of vigor, or untimely greenness, when Nature laughs at her old child, half in kindness and half in scorn. It is observable, however, I fancy, that after such a spurt, age comes on with redoubled speed, and that the old man has only run forward with a show of force, in order to fall into his grave the sooner.

Sometimes as he was walking briskly along the street, with little Pansie clasping his hand, and perhaps frisking rather more than became a person of his venerable years, he had met the grim old wreck of Colonel Dabney, moving goutily, and gathering wrath anew with every touch of his painful foot to the ground ; or driving by in his carriage, showing an ashen, angry, wrinkled face at the window, and frowning at him — the apothecary thought — with a peculiar fury, as if he took umbrage at his audacity in being less broken by age than a gentleman like himself. The apothecary could not help feeling as if there were some unsettled quarrel or dispute between himself and the Colonel, he

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

could not tell what or why. The Colonel always gave him a haughty nod of half-recognition; and the people in the street, to whom he was a familiar object, would say, "The worshipful Colonel begins to find himself mortal like the rest of us. He feels his years." "He 'd be glad, I warrant," said one, "to change with you, Doctor. It shows what difference a good life makes in men, to look at him and you. You are half a score of years his elder, methinks, and yet look what temperance can do for a man. By my credit, neighbor, seeing how brisk you have been lately, I told my wife you seemed to be growing younger. It does me good to see it. We are about of an age, I think, and I like to notice how we old men keep young and keep one another in heart. I myself—ahem—ahem—feel younger this season than for these five years past."

"It rejoices me that you feel so," quoth the apothecary, who had just been thinking that this neighbor of his had lost a great deal, both in mind and body, within a short period, and rather scorned him for it. "Indeed, I find old age less uncomfortable than I supposed. Little Pansie and I make excellent companions for one another."

And then, dragged along by Pansie's little hand, and also impelled by a certain alacrity that rose with him in the morning, and lasted till his

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

healthy rest at night, he bade farewell to his contemporary, and hastened on; while the latter, left behind, was somewhat irritated as he looked at the vigorous movement of the apothecary's legs.

"He need not make such a show of briskness, neither," muttered he to himself. "This touch of rheumatism troubles me a bit just now; but try it on a good day, and I'd walk with him for a shilling. Pshaw! I'll walk to his funeral yet."

One day, while the Doctor, with the activity that bestirred itself in him nowadays, was mixing and manufacturing certain medicaments that came in frequent demand, a carriage stopped at his door, and he recognized the voice of Colonel Dabney, talking in his customary stern tone to the woman who served him. And, a moment afterwards, the coach drove away, and he actually heard the old dignitary lumbering upstairs, and bestowing a curse upon each particular step, as if that were the method to make them soften and become easier when he should come down again. "Pray, your worship," said the Doctor from above, "let me attend you below stairs."

"No," growled the Colonel, "I'll meet you on your own ground. I can climb a stair yet, and be hanged to you."

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

So saying, he painfully finished the ascent, and came into the laboratory, where he let himself fall into the Doctor's easy-chair, with an anathema on the chair, the Doctor, and himself; and, staring round through the dusk, he met the wide-open, startled eyes of little Pansie, who had been reading a gilt picture book in the corner.

"Send away that child, Dolliver!" cried the Colonel angrily. "Confound her, she makes my bones ache. I hate everything young."

"Lord, Colonel," the poor apothecary ventured to say, "there must be young people in the world as well as old ones. 'T is my mind, a man's grandchildren keep him warm round about him."

"I have none, and want none," sharply responded the Colonel; "and as for young people, let me be one of them, and they may exist, otherwise not. It is a cursed bad arrangement of the world, that there are young and old here together."

When Pansie had gone away, which she did with anything but reluctance, having a natural antipathy to this monster of a Colonel, the latter personage tapped with his crutch-handled cane on a chair that stood near, and nodded in an authoritative way to the apothecary to sit down in it. Dr. Dolliver complied submissively, and the Colonel, with dull, unkindly eyes, looked at him

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

sternly, and with a kind of intelligence amid the aged stolidity of his aspect, that somewhat puzzled the Doctor. In this way he surveyed him all over, like a judge, when he means to hang a man, and for some reason or none, the apothecary felt his nerves shake, beneath this steadfast look.

“Aha! Doctor!” said the Colonel at last, with a doltish sneer, “you bear your years well.”

“Decently well, Colonel; I thank Providence for it,” answered the meek apothecary.

“I should say,” quoth the Colonel, “you are younger at this moment than when we spoke together two or three years ago. I noted then that your eyebrows were a handsome snow-white, such as befits a man who has passed beyond his threescore years and ten, and five years more. Why, they are getting dark again, Mr. Apothecary.”

“Nay, your worship must needs be mistaken there,” said the Doctor, with a timorous chuckle. “It is many a year since I have taken a deliberate note of my wretched old visage in a glass, but I remember they were white when I looked last.”

“Come, Doctor, I know a thing or two,” said the Colonel, with a bitter scoff; “and what’s this, you old rogue? Why, you’ve rubbed away a wrinkle since we met. Take off those

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

infernal spectacles, and look me in the face. Ha! I see the devil in your eye. How dare you let it shine upon me so?"

"On my conscience, Colonel," said the apothecary, strangely struck with the coincidence of this accusation with little Pansie's complaint, "I know not what you mean. My sight is pretty well for a man of my age. We near-sighted people begin to know our best eyesight when other people have lost theirs."

"Ah! ah! old rogue!" repeated the insufferable Colonel, gnashing his ruined teeth at him, as if, for some incomprehensible reason, he wished to tear him to pieces and devour him. "I know you. You are taking the life away from me, villain! and I told you it was my inheritance. And I told you there was a Bloody Footstep, bearing its track down through my race."

"I remember nothing of it," said the Doctor, in a quake, sure that the Colonel was in one of his mad fits. "And on the word of an honest man, I never wronged you in my life, Colonel."

"We shall see," said the Colonel, whose wrinkled visage grew absolutely terrible with its hardness; and his dull eyes, without losing their dulness, seemed to look through him.

"Listen to me, sir. Some ten years ago, there came to you a man on a secret business.

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

He had an old musty bit of parchment, on which were written some words, hardly legible, in an antique hand,—an old deed, it might have been,—some family document, and here and there the letters were faded away. But this man had spent his life over it, and he had made out the meaning, and he interpreted it to you, and left it with you; only there was one gap,—one torn or obliterated place. Well, sir,—and he bade you, with your poor little skill at the mortar, and for a certain sum,—ample repayment for such a service,—to manufacture this medicine,—this cordial. It was an affair of months. And just when you thought it finished, the man came again, and stood over your cursed beverage, and shook a powder, or dropped a lump into it, or put in some ingredient, in which was all the hidden virtue,—or, at least, it drew out all the hidden virtue of the mean and common herbs, and married them into a wondrous efficacy. This done, the man bade you do certain other things with the potion, and went away ” — the Colonel hesitated a moment — “ and never came back again.”

“ Surely, Colonel, you are correct,” said the apothecary; much startled, however, at the Colonel’s showing himself so well acquainted with an incident which he had supposed a secret with himself alone. Yet he had a little reluctance in owning it, although he did not exactly

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

understand why, since the Colonel had, apparently, no rightful claim to it, at all events.

"That medicine, that receipt," continued his visitor, "is my hereditary property, and I challenge you, on your peril, to give it up."

"But what if the original owner should call upon me for it?" objected Dr. Dolliver.

"I'll warrant you against that," said the Colonel; and the apothecary thought there was something ghastly in his look and tone. "Why, 't is ten year, you old fool; and do you think a man with a treasure like that in his possession would have waited so long?"

"Seven years it was ago," said the apothecary. "*Septem annis passatis*: so says the Latin."

"Curse your Latin," answers the Colonel. "Produce the stuff. You have been violating the first rule of your trade, — taking your own drugs, — your own, in one sense; mine by the right of three hundred years. Bring it forth, I say!"

"Pray excuse me, worthy Colonel," pleaded the apothecary; for though convinced that the old gentleman was only in one of his insane fits, when he talked of the value of this concoction, yet he really did not like to give up the cordial, which perhaps had wrought him some benefit. Besides, he had at least a claim upon it for much trouble and skill expended in its compo-

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

sition. This he suggested to the Colonel, who scornfully took out of his pocket a network purse, with more golden guineas in it than the apothecary had seen in the whole seven years, and was rude enough to fling it in his face. "Take that," thundered he, "and give up the thing, or I will have you in prison before you are an hour older! Nay," he continued, growing pale, which was his mode of showing terrible wrath; since all through life, till extreme age quenched it, his ordinary face had been a blazing red, "I'll put you to death, you villain, as I've a right!" And thrusting his hand into his waistcoat pocket, lo! the madman took a small pistol from it, which he cocked, and presented at the poor apothecary. The old fellow quaked and cowered in his chair, and would indeed have given his whole shopful of better concocted medicines than this, to be out of this danger. Besides, there were the guineas; the Colonel had paid him a princely sum for what was probably worth nothing.

"Hold! hold!" cried he, as the Colonel, with stern eye, pointed the pistol at his head. "You shall have it."

So he rose all trembling, and crept to that secret cupboard, where the precious bottle — since precious it seemed to be — was repositied. In all his life, long as it had been, the apothecary had never before been threatened by a

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

deadly weapon ; though many as deadly a thing had he seen poured into a glass, without winking. And so it seemed to take his heart and life away, and he brought the cordial forth feebly, and stood tremulously before the Colonel, ashy pale, and looking ten years older than his real age, instead of five years younger, as he had seemed just before this disastrous interview with the Colonel.

“You look as if you needed a drop of it yourself,” said Colonel Dabney, with great scorn. “But not a drop shall you have. Already have you stolen too much,” said he, lifting up the bottle, and marking the space to which the liquor had subsided in it in consequence of the minute doses with which the apothecary had made free. “Fool, had you taken your glass like a man, you might have been young again. Now, creep on, the few months you have left, poor, torpid knave, and die ! Come — a goblet ! quick !”

He clutched the bottle meanwhile voraciously, miserly, eagerly, furiously, as if it were his life that he held in his grasp ; angry, impatient, as if something long sought were within his reach, and not yet secure, — with longing thirst and desire ; suspicious of the world and of fate ; feeling as if an iron hand were over him, and a crowd of violent robbers round about him, struggling for it. At last, unable to wait longer,

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

just as the apothecary was tottering away in quest of a drinking glass, the Colonel took out the stopple, and lifted the flask itself to his lips.

“For Heaven’s sake, no!” cried the Doctor. “The dose is one single drop! — one drop, Colonel, one drop!”

“Not a drop to save your wretched old soul,” responded the Colonel; probably thinking that the apothecary was pleading for a small share of the precious liquor. He put it to his lips, and, as if quenching a lifelong thirst, swallowed deep draughts, sucking it in with desperation, till, void of breath, he set it down upon the table. The rich, poignant perfume spread itself through the air.

The apothecary, with an instinctive carefulness that was rather ludicrous under the circumstances, caught up the stopper, which the Colonel had let fall, and forced it into the bottle to prevent any further escape of virtue. He then fearfully watched the result of the madman’s potation.

The Colonel sat a moment in his chair, panting for breath; then started to his feet with a prompt vigor that contrasted widely with the infirm and rheumatic movements that had heretofore characterized him. He struck his forehead violently with one hand, and smote his chest with the other; he stamped his foot thun-

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

derously on the ground ; then he leaped up to the ceiling, and came down with an elastic bound. Then he laughed, a wild, exulting ha ! ha ! with a strange triumphant roar that filled the house and reëchoed through it ; a sound full of fierce, animal rapture, — enjoyment of sensual life mixed up with a sort of horror. After all, real as it was, it was like the sounds a man makes in a dream. And this, while the potent draught seemed still to be making its way through his system ; and the frightened apothecary thought that he intended a revengeful onslaught upon himself. Finally, he uttered a loud unearthly screech, in the midst of which his voice broke, as if some unseen hand were throttling him, and, starting forward, he fought frantically, as if he would clutch the life that was being rent away, — and fell forward with a dead thump upon the floor.

“Colonel ! Colonel !” cried the terrified Doctor.

The feeble old man, with difficulty, turned over the heavy frame, and saw at once, with practised eye, that he was dead. He set him up, and the corpse looked at him with angry reproach. He was so startled, that his subsequent recollections of the moment were neither distinct nor steadfast ; but he fancied, though he told the strange impression to no one, that on his first glimpse of the face, with a dark flush of what

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

looked like rage still upon it, it was a young man's face that he saw, — a face with all the passionate energy of early manhood, — the capacity for furious anger which the man had lost half a century ago, crammed to the brim with vigor till it became agony. But the next moment, if it were so (which it could not have been), the face grew ashen, withered, shrunken, more aged than in life, though still the murderous fierceness remained, and seemed to be petrified forever upon it.

After a moment's bewilderment, Dolliver ran to the window looking to the street, threw it open, and called loudly for assistance. He opened also another window, for the air to blow through, for he was almost stifled with the rich odor of the cordial which filled the room, and was now exuded from the corpse.

He heard the voice of Pansie, crying at the door, which was locked, and, turning the key, he caught her in his arms, and hastened with her below stairs, to give her into the charge of Martha, who seemed half stupefied with a sense of something awful that had occurred.

Meanwhile there was a rattling and a banging at the street portal, to which several people had been attracted both by the Doctor's outcry from the window, and by the awful screech in which the Colonel's spirit (if, indeed, he had that divine part) had just previously taken its flight.

THE DOLLIVER ROMANCE

He let them in, and, pale and shivering, ushered them up to the death chamber, where one or two, with a more delicate sense of smelling than the rest, snuffed the atmosphere, as if sensible of an unknown fragrance, yet appeared afraid to breathe, when they saw the terrific countenance leaning back against the chair, and eyeing them so truculently.

I would fain quit the scene and have done with the Colonel, who, I am glad, has happened to die at so early a period of the narrative. I therefore hasten to say that a coroner's inquest was held on the spot, though everybody felt that it was merely ceremonial, and that the testimony of their good and ancient townsman, Dr. Dolliver, was amply sufficient to settle the matter. The verdict was, "Death by the visitation of God."

The apothecary gave evidence that the Colonel, without asking leave, and positively against his advice, had drunk a quantity of distilled spirits; and one or two servants, or members of the Colonel's family, testified that he had been in a very uncomfortable state of mind for some days past, so that they fancied he was insane. Therefore nobody thought of blaming Dr. Dolliver for what had happened; and, if the plain truth must be told, everybody who saw the wretch was too well content to be rid of him, to trouble themselves more than was quite neces-

ANOTHER FRAGMENT

sary about the way in which the incumbrance had been removed.

The corpse was taken to the mansion in order to receive a magnificent funeral ; and Dr. DOLLIVER was left outwardly in quiet, but much disturbed, and indeed almost overwhelmed inwardly, by what had happened. Yet it is to be observed, that he had accounted for the death with a singular dexterity of expression, when he attributed it to a dose of distilled spirits. What kind of distilled spirits were those, Doctor ? and will you venture to take any more of them ?

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

OR, THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

IT was a day in early spring; and as that sweet, genial time of year and atmosphere calls out tender greenness from the ground, — beautiful flowers, or leaves that look beautiful because so long unseen under the snow and decay, — so the pleasant air and warmth had called out three young people, who sat on a sunny hillside enjoying the warm day and one another. For they were all friends: two of them young men, and playmates from boyhood; the third a girl, who, two or three years younger than themselves, had been the object of their boy love, their little rustic, childish gallantries, their budding affections; until, growing all towards manhood and womanhood, they had ceased to talk about such matters, perhaps thinking about them the more.

These three young people were neighbors' children, dwelling in houses that stood by the side of the great Lexington road, along a ridgy hill that rose abruptly behind them, its brow covered with a wood, and which stretched, with one or two breaks and interruptions, into the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

heart of the village of Concord, the county town. It was in the side of this hill that, according to tradition, the first settlers of the village had burrowed in caverns which they had dug out for their shelter, like swallows and woodchucks. As its slope was towards the south, and its ridge and crowning woods defended them from the northern blasts and snowdrifts, it was an admirable situation for the fierce New England winter; and the temperature was milder, by several degrees, along this hillside than on the unprotected plains, or by the river, or in any other part of Concord. So that here, during the hundred years that had elapsed since the first settlement of the place, dwellings had successively risen close to the hill's foot, and the meadow that lay on the other side of the road — a fertile tract — had been cultivated; and these three young people were the children's children's children of persons of respectability who had dwelt there, — Rose Garfield, in a small house, the site of which is still indicated by the cavity of a cellar, in which I this very past summer planted some sunflowers to thrust their great disks out from the hollow and allure the bee and the humming bird; Robert Hagburn, in a house of somewhat more pretension, a hundred yards or so nearer to the village, standing back from the road in the broader space which the retreating

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

hill, cloven by a gap in that place, afforded ; where some elms intervened between it and the road, offering a site which some person of a natural taste for the gently picturesque had seized upon. Those same elms, or their successors, still flung a noble shade over the same old house, which the magic hand of Alcott has improved by the touch that throws grace, amiableness, and natural beauty over scenes that have little pretension in themselves.

Now, the other young man, Septimius Felton, dwelt in a small wooden house, then, I suppose, of some score of years' standing, — a two-story house, gabled before, but with only two rooms on a floor, crowded upon by the hill behind, — a house of thick walls, as if the projector had that sturdy feeling of permanence in life which incites people to make strong their earthly habitations, as if deluding themselves with the idea that they could still inhabit them ; in short, an ordinary dwelling of a well-to-do New England farmer, such as his race had been for two or three generations past, although there were traditions of ancestors who had led lives of thought and study, and possessed all the erudition that the universities of England could bestow. Whether any natural turn for study had descended to Septimius from these worthies, or how his tendencies came to be different from those of his family, — who, within

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

the memory of the neighborhood, had been content to sow and reap the rich field in front of their homestead, — so it was, that Septimius had early manifested a taste for study. By the kind aid of the good minister of the town he had been fitted for college ; had passed through Cambridge by means of what little money his father had left him and by his own exertions in schoolkeeping ; and was now a recently decorated baccalaureate, with, as was understood, a purpose to devote himself to the ministry, under the auspices of that reverend and good friend whose support and instruction had already stood him in such stead.

Now here were these young people, on that beautiful spring morning, sitting on the hillside, a pleasant spectacle of fresh life, — pleasant, as if they had sprouted like green things under the influence of the warm sun. The girl was very pretty, a little freckled, a little tanned, but with a face that glimmered and gleamed with quick and cheerful expressions ; a slender form, not very large, with a quick grace in its movements ; sunny hair that had a tendency to curl, which she probably favored at such moments as her household occupation left her ; a sociable and pleasant child, as both of the young men evidently thought. Robert Hagburn, one might suppose, would have been the most to

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

her taste: a ruddy, burly young fellow, handsome, and free of manner, six feet high, famous through the neighborhood for strength and athletic skill, the early promise of what was to be a man fit for all offices of active rural life, and to be, in mature age, the selectman, the deacon, the representative, the colonel. As for Septimius, let him alone a moment or two, and then they would see him, with his head bent down, brooding, brooding, his eyes fixed on some chip, some stone, some common plant, any commonest thing, as if it were the clew and index to some mystery; and when, by chance startled out of these meditations, he lifted his eyes, there would be a kind of perplexity, a dissatisfied, foiled look in them, as if of his speculations he found no end. Such was now the case, while Robert and the girl were running on with a gay talk about a serious subject, so that, gay as it was, it was interspersed with little thrills of fear on the girl's part, of excitement on Robert's. Their talk was of public trouble.

"My grandfather says," said Rose Garfield, "that we shall never be able to stand against old England, because the men are a weaker race than he remembers in his day, — weaker than his father, who came from England, — and the women slighter still; so that we are

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

dwindling away, grandfather thinks ; only a little sprightlier, he says sometimes, looking at me."

"Lighter, to be sure," said Robert Hagburn ; "there is the lightness of the Englishwomen compressed into little space. I have seen them and know. And as to the men, Rose, if they have lost one spark of courage and strength that their English forefathers brought from the old land, — lost any one good quality without having it made up by as good or better, — then, for my part, I don't want the breed to exist any longer. And this war, that they say is coming on, will be a good opportunity to test the matter. Septimius ! don't you think so?"

"Think what?" asked Septimius gravely, lifting up his head.

"Think ! why, that your countrymen are worthy to live," said Robert Hagburn impatiently. "For there is a question on that point."

"It is hardly worth answering or considering," said Septimius, looking at him thoughtfully. "We live so little while, that (always setting aside the effect on a future existence) it is little matter whether we live or no."

"Little matter !" said Rose, at first bewildered, then laughing, — "little matter ! when it is such a comfort to live, so pleasant, so sweet !"

"Yes, and so many things to do," said Rob-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ert: "to make fields yield produce; to be busy among men, and happy among the women folk; to play, work, fight, and be active in many ways."

"Yes; but so soon stilled, before your activity has come to any definite end," responded Septimius gloomily. "I doubt, if it had been left to my choice, whether I should have taken existence on such terms; so much trouble of preparation to live, and then no life at all; a ponderous beginning, and nothing more."

"Do you find fault with Providence, Septimius?" asked Rose, a feeling of solemnity coming over her cheerful and buoyant nature. Then she burst out a-laughing. "How grave he looks, Robert; as if he had lived two or three lives already, and knew all about the value of it. But I think it was worth while to be born, if only for the sake of one such pleasant spring morning as this; and God gives us many and better things when these are past."

"We hope so," said Septimius, who was again looking on the ground. "But who knows?"

"I thought you knew," said Robert Hagburn. "You have been to college, and have learned, no doubt, a great many things. You are a student of theology, too, and have looked into these matters. Who should know, if not you?"

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“ Rose and you have just as good means of ascertaining these points as I,” said Septimius ; “ all the certainty that can be had lies on the surface, as it should, and equally accessible to every man or woman. If we try to grope deeper, we labor for naught, and get less wise while we try to be more so. If life were long enough to enable us thoroughly to sift these matters, then, indeed ! — but it is so short ! ”

“ Always this same complaint,” said Robert. “ Septimius, how long do you wish to live ? ”

“ Forever ! ” said Septimius. “ It is none too long for all I wish to know. ”

“ Forever ? ” exclaimed Rose, shivering doubtfully. “ Ah, there would come many, many thoughts, and after a while we should want a little rest. ”

“ Forever ? ” said Robert Hagburn. “ And what would the people do who wish to fill our places ? You are unfair, Septimius. Live and let live ! Turn about ! Give me my seventy years, and let me go, — my seventy years of what this life has, — toil, enjoyment, suffering, struggle, fight, rest, — only let me have my share of what’s going, and I shall be content. ”

“ Content with leaving everything at odd ends ; content with being nothing, as you were before ! ”

“ No, Septimius, content with heaven at last,” said Rose, who had come out of her

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

laughing mood into a sweet seriousness. "O dear! think what a worn and ugly thing one of these fresh little blades of grass would seem if it were not to fade and wither in its time, after being green in its time."

"Well, well, my pretty Rose," said Septimius apart, "an immortal weed is not very lovely to think of, that is true; but I should be content with one thing, and that is yourself, if you were immortal, just as you are at seventeen, so fresh, so dewy, so red-lipped, so golden-haired, so gay, so frolicsome, so gentle."

"But I am to grow old, and to be brown and wrinkled, gray-haired and ugly," said Rose rather sadly, as she thus enumerated the items of her decay, "and then you would think me all lost and gone. But still there might be youth underneath, for one that really loved me to see. Ah, Septimius Felton! such love as would see with ever new eyes is the true love." And she ran away and left him suddenly, and Robert Hagburn departing at the same time, this little knot of three was dissolved, and Septimius went along the wayside wall, thoughtfully, as was his wont, to his own dwelling. He had stopped for some moments on the threshold, vaguely enjoying, it is probable, the light and warmth of the new spring day and the sweet air, which was somewhat unwonted to the young man, because he was accustomed to spend

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

much of his day in thought and study within doors, and, indeed, like most studious young men, was overfond of the fireside, and of making life as artificial as he could, by fireside heat and lamplight, in order to suit it to the artificial, intellectual, and moral atmosphere which he derived from books, instead of living healthfully in the open air, and among his fellow beings. Still he felt the pleasure of being warmed through by this natural heat, and, though blinking a little from its superfluity, could not but confess an enjoyment and cheerfulness in this flood of morning light that came aslant the hillside. While he thus stood, he felt a friendly hand laid upon his shoulder, and, looking up, there was the minister of the village, the old friend of Septimius, to whose advice and aid it was owing that Septimius had followed his instincts by going to college, instead of spending a thwarted and dissatisfied life in the field that fronted the house. He was a man of middle age, or little beyond, of a sagacious, kindly aspect; the experience, the lifelong, intimate acquaintance with many concerns of his people being more apparent in him than the scholarship for which he had been early distinguished. A tanned man, like one who labored in his own grounds occasionally; a man of homely, plain address, which, when occasion called for it, he could readily exchange for the polished manner of one

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

who had seen a more refined world than this about him.

"Well, Septimius," said the minister kindly, "have you yet come to any conclusion about the subject of which we have been talking?"

"Only so far, sir," replied Septimius, "that I find myself every day less inclined to take up the profession which I have had in view so many years. I do not think myself fit for the sacred desk."

"Surely not; no one is," replied the clergyman; "but if I may trust my own judgment, you have at least many of the intellectual qualifications that should adapt you to it. There is something of the Puritan character in you, Septimius, derived from holy men among your ancestors; as, for instance, a deep, brooding turn, such as befits that heavy brow; a disposition to meditate on things hidden; a turn for meditative inquiry, — all these things, with grace to boot, mark you as the germ of a man who might do God service. Your reputation as a scholar stands high at college. You have not a turn for worldly business."

"Ah, but, sir," said Septimius, casting down his heavy brows, "I lack something within."

"Faith, perhaps," replied the minister; "at least, you think so."

"Cannot I know it?" asked Septimius.

"Scarcely, just now," said his friend. "Study

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

for the ministry ; bind your thoughts to it ; pray ; ask a belief, and you will soon find you have it. Doubts may occasionally press in ; and it is so with every clergyman. But your prevailing mood will be faith."

"It has seemed to me," observed Septimius, "that it is not the prevailing mood, the most common one, that is to be trusted. This is habit, formality, the shallow covering which we close over what is real, and seldom suffer to be blown aside. But it is the snakelike doubt that thrusts out its head, which gives us a glimpse of reality. Surely such moments are a hundred times as real as the dull, quiet moments of faith or what you call such."

"I am sorry for you," said the minister ; "yet to a youth of your frame of character, of your ability I will say, and your requisition for something profound in the grounds of your belief, it is not unusual to meet this trouble. Men like you have to fight for their faith. They fight in the first place to win it, and ever afterwards to hold it. The Devil tilts with them daily, and often seems to win."

"Yes ; but," replied Septimius, "he takes deadly weapons now. If he meet me with the cold pure steel of a spiritual argument, I might win or lose, and still not feel that all was lost ; but he takes, as it were, a great clod of earth, massive rocks and mud, soil and dirt, and flings

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

it at me overwhelmingly ; so that I am buried under it."

"How is that?" said the minister. "Tell me more plainly."

"May it not be possible," asked Septimius, "to have too profound a sense of the marvelous contrivance and adaptation of this material world to require or believe in anything spiritual? How wonderful it is to see it all alive on this spring day, all growing, budding! Do we exhaust it in our little life? Not so; not in a hundred or a thousand lives. The whole race of man, living from the beginning of time, have not, in all their number and multiplicity and in all their duration, come in the least to know the world they live in! And how is this rich world thrown away upon us, because we live in it such a moment! What mortal work has ever been done since the world began! Because we have no time. No lesson is taught. We are snatched away from our study before we have learned the alphabet. As the world now exists, I confess it to you frankly, my dear pastor and instructor, it seems to me all a failure, because we do not live long enough."

"But the lesson is carried on in another state of being!"

"Not the lesson that we begin here," said Septimius. "We might as well train a child in a primeval forest, to teach him how to live in a

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

European court. No, the fall of man, which Scripture tells us of, seems to me to have its operation in this grievous shortening of earthly existence, so that our life here at all is grown ridiculous."

"Well, Septimius," replied the minister sadly, yet not as one shocked by what he had never heard before, "I must leave you to struggle through this form of unbelief as best you may, knowing that it is by your own efforts that you must come to the other side of this slough. We will talk further another time. You are getting worn out, my young friend, with much study and anxiety. It were well for you to live more, for the present, in this earthly life that you prize so highly. Cannot you interest yourself in the state of this country, in this coming strife, the voice of which now sounds so hoarsely and so near us? Come out of your thoughts and breathe another air."

"I will try," said Septimius.

"Do," said the minister, extending his hand to him, "and in a little time you will find the change."

He shook the young man's hand kindly, and took his leave, while Septimius entered his house, and turning to the right sat down in his study, where, before the fireplace, stood the table with books and papers. On the shelves around the low-studded walls were more books,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

few in number, but of an erudite appearance, many of them having descended to him from learned ancestors, and having been brought to light by himself after long lying in dusty closets; works of good and learned divines, whose wisdom he had happened, by help of the Devil, to turn to mischief, reading them by the light of hell fire. For, indeed, Septimius had but given the clergyman the merest partial glimpse of his state of mind. He was not a new beginner in doubt; but, on the contrary, it seemed to him as if he had never been other than a doubter and questioner, even in his boyhood; believing nothing, although a thin veil of reverence had kept him from questioning some things. And now the new, strange thought of the sufficiency of the world for man, if man were only sufficient for that, kept recurring to him; and with it came a certain sense, which he had been conscious of before, that he, at least, might never die. The feeling was not peculiar to Septimius. It is an instinct, the meaning of which is mistaken. We have strongly within us the sense of an undying principle, and we transfer that true sense to this life and to the body, instead of interpreting it justly as the promise of spiritual immortality. .

So Septimius looked up out of his thoughts, and said proudly: "Why should I die? I cannot die, if worthy to live. What if I should

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

say this moment that I will not die, not till ages hence, not till the world is exhausted? Let other men die, if they choose, or yield ; let him that is strong enough live ! ”

After this flush of heroic mood, however, the glow subsided, and poor Septimius spent the rest of the day, as was his wont, poring over his books, in which all the meanings seemed dead and mouldy, and like pressed leaves (some of which dropped out of the books as he opened them), brown, brittle, sapless ; so even the thoughts, which when the writers had gathered them seemed to them so brightly colored and full of life. Then he began to see that there must have been some principle of life left out of the book, so that these gathered thoughts lacked something that had given them their only value. Then he suspected that the way truly to live and answer the purposes of life was not to gather up thoughts into books, where they grew so dry, but to live and still be going about, full of green wisdom, ripening ever, not in maxims cut and dry, but a wisdom ready for daily occasions, like a living fountain ; and that to be this, it was necessary to exist long on earth, drink in all its lessons, and not to die on the attainment of some smattering of truth ; but to live all the more for that, and apply it to mankind and increase it thereby.

Everything drifted towards the strong, strange

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

eddy into which his mind had been drawn : all his thoughts set hitherward.

So he sat brooding in his study until the shrill-voiced old woman — an aunt, who was his house-keeper and domestic ruler — called him to dinner, — a frugal dinner, — and chided him for seeming inattentive to a dish of early dandelions which she had gathered for him ; but yet tempered her severity with respect for the future clerical rank of her nephew, and for his already being a bachelor of arts. The old woman's voice spoke outside of Septimius, rambling away, and he paying little heed, till at last dinner was over, and Septimius drew back his chair, about to leave the table.

"Nephew Septimius," said the old woman, "you began this meal to-day without asking a blessing, you get up from it without giving thanks, and you soon to be a minister of the Word."

"God bless the meat," replied Septimius (by way of blessing), "and make it strengthen us for the life he means us to bear. Thank God for our food," he added (by way of grace), "and may it become a portion in us of an immortal body."

"That sounds good, Septimius," said the old lady. "Ah ! you 'll be a mighty man in the pulpit, and worthy to keep up the name of your great-grandfather, who, they say, made the leaves

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

wither on a tree with the fierceness of his blast against a sin. Some say, to be sure, it was an early frost that helped him."

"I never heard that before, Aunt Keziah," said Septimius.

"I warrant you no," replied his aunt. "A man dies, and his greatness perishes as if it had never been, and people remember nothing of him only when they see his gravestone over his old dry bones, and say he was a good man in his day."

"What truth there is in Aunt Keziah's words!" exclaimed Septimius. "And how I hate the thought and anticipation of that contemptuous appreciation of a man after his death! Every living man triumphs over every dead one, as he lies, poor and helpless, under the mould, a pinch of dust, a heap of bones, an evil odor! I hate the thought! It shall not be so!"

It was strange how every little incident thus brought him back to that one subject which was taking so strong hold of his mind; every avenue led thitherward; and he took it for an indication that nature had intended, by innumerable ways, to point out to us the great truth that death was an alien misfortune, a prodigy, a monstrosity, into which man had only fallen by defect; and that even now, if a man had a reasonable portion of his original strength in him, he might live forever and spurn death.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Our story is an internal one, dealing as little as possible with outward events, and taking hold of these only where it cannot be helped, in order by means of them to delineate the history of a mind bewildered in certain errors. We would not willingly, if we could, give a lively and picturesque surrounding to this delineation, but it is necessary that we should advert to the circumstances of the time in which this inward history was passing. We will say, therefore, that that night there was a cry of alarm passing all through the succession of country towns and rural communities that lay around Boston, and dying away towards the coast and the wilder forest borders. Horsemen galloped past the line of farmhouses shouting alarm ! alarm ! There were stories of marching troops coming like dreams through the midnight. Around the little rude meeting-houses there was here and there the beat of a drum, and the assemblage of farmers with their weapons. So all that night there was marching, there was mustering, there was trouble ; and, on the road from Boston, a steady march of soldiers' feet onward, onward into the land whose last warlike disturbance had been when the red Indians trod it.

Septimius heard it, and knew, like the rest, that it was the sound of coming war. " Fools that men are ! " said he, as he rose from bed and looked out at the misty stars ; " they do not live

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

long enough to know the value and purport of life, else they would combine together to live long, instead of throwing away the lives of thousands as they do. And what matters a little tyranny in so short a life? What matters a form of government for such ephemeral creatures?"

As morning brightened, these sounds, this clamor, — or something that was in the air and caused the clamor, — grew so loud that Septimius seemed to feel it even in his solitude. It was in the atmosphere, — storm, wild excitement, a coming deed. Men hurried along the usually lonely road in groups, with weapons in their hands, — the old fowling piece of seven-foot barrel, with which the Puritans had shot ducks on the river and Walden Pond; the heavy harquebus, which perhaps had levelled one of King Philip's Indians; the old King gun, that blazed away at the French of Louisburg or Quebec, — hunter, husbandman, all were hurrying each other. It was a good time, everybody felt, to be alive, a nearer kindred, a closer sympathy between man and man; a sense of the goodness of the world, of the sacredness of country, of the excellence of life; and yet its slight account compared with any truth, any principle; the weighing of the material and ethereal, and the finding the former not worth considering, when, nevertheless, ~~it~~^{there} was so much to do with the settlement

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

of the crisis. The ennobling of brute force ; the feeling that it had its godlike side ; the drawing of heroic breath amid the scenes of ordinary life, so that it seemed as if they had all been transfigured since yesterday. O, high, heroic, tremulous juncture, when man felt himself almost an angel ; on the verge of doing deeds that outwardly look so fiendish ! O, strange rapture of the coming battle ! We know something of that time now ; we that have seen the muster of the village soldiery on the meeting-house green and at railway stations ; and heard the drum and fife, and seen the farewells ; seen the familiar faces that we hardly knew, now that we felt them to be heroes ; breathed higher breath for their sakes ; felt our eyes moistened ; thanked them in our souls for teaching us that nature is yet capable of heroic moments ; felt how a great impulse lifts up a people, and every cold, passionless, indifferent spectator, — lifts him up into religion, and makes him join in what becomes an act of devotion, a prayer, when perhaps he but half approves.

Septimius could not study on a morning like this. He tried to say to himself that he had nothing to do with this excitement ; that his studious life kept him away from it ; that his intended profession was that of peace ; but say what he might to himself, there was a tremor, a bubbling impulse, a tingling in his ears, — the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

page that he opened glimmered and dazzled before him.

"Septimius! Septimius!" cried Aunt Keziah, looking into the room, "in Heaven's name, are you going to sit here to-day, and the redcoats coming to burn the house over our heads? Must I sweep you out with the broomstick? For shame, boy! for shame!"

"Are they coming, then, Aunt Keziah?" asked her nephew. "Well, I am not a fighting man."

"Certain they are. They have sacked Lexington, and slain the people, and burnt the meeting-house. That concerns even the parsons; and you reckon yourself among them. Go out, go out, I say, and learn the news!"

Whether moved by these exhortations or by his own stifled curiosity, Septimius did at length issue from his door, though with that reluctance which hampers and impedes men whose current of thought and interest runs apart from that of the world in general; but forth he came, feeling strangely, and yet with a strong impulse to fling himself headlong into the emotion of the moment. It was a beautiful morning, spring-like and summerlike at once. If there had been nothing else to do or think of, such a morning was enough for life only to breathe its air and be conscious of its inspiring influence.

Septimius turned along the road towards the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

village, meaning to mingle with the crowd on the green, and there learn all he could of the rumors that vaguely filled the air, and doubtless were shaping themselves into various forms of fiction.

As he passed the small dwelling of Rose Garfield, she stood on the doorstep, and bounded forth a little way to meet him, looking frightened, excited, and yet half pleased, but strangely pretty; prettier than ever before, owing to some hasty adornment or other, that she would never have succeeded so well in giving to herself if she had had more time to do it in.

"Septimius — Mr. Felton!" cried she, asking information of him who, of all men in the neighborhood, knew nothing of the intelligence afloat; but it showed a certain importance that Septimius had with her. "Do you really think the redcoats are coming? Ah, what shall we do? What shall we do? But you are not going to the village, too, and leave us all alone?"

"I know not whether they are coming or no, Rose," said Septimius, stopping to admire the young girl's fresh beauty, which made a double stroke upon him by her excitement, and, moreover, made her twice as free with him as ever she had been before; for there is nothing truer than that any breaking up of the ordinary state of things is apt to shake women out of their proprieties, break down barriers, and bring them

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

into perilous proximity with the world. "Are you alone here? Had you not better take shelter in the village?"

"And leave my poor, bedridden grandmother!" cried Rose angrily. "You know I can't, Septimius. But I suppose I am in no danger. Go to the village, if you like."

"Where is Robert Hagburn?" asked Septimius.

"Gone to the village this hour past, with his grandfather's old firelock on his shoulder," said Rose; "he was running bullets before daylight."

"Rose, I will stay with you," said Septimius.

"O gracious, here they come, I'm sure!" cried Rose. "Look yonder at the dust. Mercy! a man at a gallop!"

In fact, along the road, a considerable stretch of which was visible, they heard the clatter of hoofs and saw a little cloud of dust approaching at the rate of a gallop, and disclosing, as it drew near, a hatless countryman in his shirt sleeves, who, bending over his horse's neck, applied a cart whip lustily to the animal's flanks, so as to incite him to most unwonted speed. At the same time, glaring upon Rose and Septimius, he lifted up his voice and shouted in a strange, high tone, that communicated the tremor and excitement of the shouter to each auditor: "Alarum!

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

alarum ! alarum ! The redcoats ! The redcoats !
To arms ! alarum ! ”

And trailing this sound far wavering behind him like a pennon, the eager horseman dashed onward to the village.

“ O dear, what shall we do ? ” cried Rose, her eyes full of tears, yet dancing with excitement. “ They are coming ! they are coming ! I hear the drum and fife. ”

“ I really believe they are, ” said Septimius, his cheek flushing and growing pale, not with fear, but the inevitable tremor, half painful, half pleasurable, of the moment. “ Hark ! there was the shrill note of a fife. Yes, they are coming ! ”

He tried to persuade Rose to hide herself in the house ; but that young person would not be persuaded to do so, clinging to Septimius in a way that flattered while it perplexed him. Besides, with all the girl’s fright, she had still a good deal of courage, and much curiosity too, to see what these redcoats were of whom she heard such terrible stories.

“ Well, well, Rose, ” said Septimius, “ I doubt not we may stay here without danger, — you, a woman, and I, whose profession is to be that of peace and good will to all men. They cannot, whatever is said of them, be on an errand of massacre. We will stand here quietly ; and,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

seeing that we do not fear them, they will understand that we mean them no harm."

They stood, accordingly, a little in front of the door by the well curb, and soon they saw a heavy cloud of dust, from amidst which shone bayonets ; and anon, a military band, which had hitherto been silent, struck up, with drum and fife, to which the tramp of a thousand feet fell in regular order ; then came the column, moving massively, and the redcoats who seemed somewhat wearied by a long night march, dusty, with bedraggled gaiters, covered with sweat which had run down from their powdered locks. Nevertheless, these ruddy, lusty Englishmen marched stoutly, as men that needed only a half hour's rest, a good breakfast, and a pot of beer apiece, to make them ready to face the world. Nor did their faces look anywise rancorous ; but at most, only heavy, cloddish, good-natured, and humane.

"O heavens, Mr. Felton !" whispered Rose, "why should we shoot these men, or they us ? They look kind, if homely. Each of them has a mother and sisters, I suppose, just like our men."

"It is the strangest thing in the world that we can think of killing them," said Septimius. "Human life is so precious."

Just as they were passing the cottage, a halt was called by the commanding officer, in order

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

that some little rest might get the troops into a better condition and give them breath before entering the village, where it was important to make as imposing a show as possible. During this brief stop, some of the soldiers approached the well curb, near which Rose and Septimius were standing, and let down the bucket to satisfy their thirst. A young officer, a petulant boy, extremely handsome, and of gay and buoyant deportment, also came up.

“Get me a cup, pretty one,” said he, patting Rose’s cheek with great freedom, though it was somewhat and indefinitely short of rudeness; “a mug, or something to drink out of, and you shall have a kiss for your pains.”

“Stand off, sir!” said Septimius fiercely. “It is a coward’s part to insult a woman.”

“I intend no insult in this,” replied the handsome young officer, suddenly snatching a kiss from Rose, before she could draw back. “And if you think it so, my good friend, you had better take your weapon and get as much satisfaction as you can, shooting at me from behind a hedge.”

Before Septimius could reply or act, — and, in truth, the easy presumption of the young Englishman made it difficult for him, an inexperienced recluse as he was, to know what to do or say, — the drum beat a little tap, recalling the soldiers to their rank and to order. The

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

young officer hastened back, with a laughing glance at Rose, and a light, contemptuous look of defiance at Septimius, the drums rattling out in full beat, and the troops marched on.

“What impertinence!” said Rose, whose indignant color made her look pretty enough almost to excuse the offence.

It is not easy to see how Septimius could have shielded her from the insult; and yet he felt inconceivably outraged and humiliated at the thought that this offence had occurred while Rose was under his protection, and he responsible for her. Besides, somehow or other, he was angry with her for having undergone the wrong, though certainly most unreasonably; for the whole thing was quicker done than said.

“You had better go into the house now, Rose,” said he, “and see to your bedridden grandmother.”

“And what will you do, Septimius?” asked she.

“Perhaps I will house myself, also,” he replied. “Perhaps take yonder proud redcoat’s counsel, and shoot him behind a hedge.”

“But not kill him outright; I suppose he has a mother and a sweetheart, the handsome young officer,” murmured Rose pityingly to herself.

Septimius went into his house, and sat in his study for some hours, in that unpleasant state

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

of feeling which a man of brooding thought is apt to experience when the world around him is in a state of intense action, which he finds it impossible to sympathize with. There seemed to be a stream rushing past him, by which, even if he plunged into the midst of it, he could not be wet. He felt himself strangely ajar with the human race, and would have given much either to be in full accord with it, or to be separated from it forever.

“ I am dissevered from it. It is my doom to be only a spectator of life ; to look on as one apart from it. Is it not well, therefore, that, sharing none of its pleasures and happiness, I should be free of its fatalities, its brevity ? How cold I am now, while this whirlpool of public feeling is eddying around me ! It is as if I had not been born of woman ! ”

Thus it was that, drawing wild inferences from phenomena of the mind and heart common to people who, by some morbid action within themselves, are set ajar with the world, Septimius continued still to come round to that strange idea of undyingness which had recently taken possession of him. And yet he was wrong in thinking himself cold, and that he felt no sympathy in the fever of patriotism that was throbbing through his countrymen. He was restless as a flame ; he could not fix his thoughts upon his book ; he could not sit in his chair, but kept

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

pacing to and fro, while through the open window came noises to which his imagination gave diverse interpretation. Now it was a distant drum; now shouts; by and by there came the rattle of musketry, that seemed to proceed from some point more distant than the village; a regular roll, then a ragged volley, then scattering shots. Unable any longer to preserve this unnatural indifference, Septimius snatched his gun, and, rushing out of the house, climbed the abrupt hillside behind, whence he could see a long way towards the village, till a slight bend hid the uneven road. It was quite vacant, not a passenger upon it. But there seemed to be confusion in that direction; an unseen and inscrutable trouble, blowing thence towards him, intimated by vague sounds, — by no sounds. Listening eagerly, however, he at last fancied a mustering sound of the drum; then it seemed as if it were coming towards him; while in advance rode another horseman, the same kind of headlong messenger, in appearance, who had passed the house with his ghastly cry of alarum; then appeared scattered countrymen, with guns in their hands, straggling across fields. Then he caught sight of the regular array of British soldiers, filling the road with their front, and marching along as firmly as ever, though at a quick pace, while he fancied that the officers looked watchfully around. As he looked, a shot rang

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

sharp from the hillside towards the village ; the smoke curled up, and Septimius saw a man stagger and fall in the midst of the troops. Septimius shuddered ; it was so like murder that he really could not tell the difference ; his knees trembled beneath him ; his breath grew short, not with terror, but with some new sensation of awe.

Another shot or two came almost simultaneously from the wooded height, but without any effect that Septimius could perceive. Almost at the same moment a company of the British soldiers wheeled from the main body, and, dashing out of the road, climbed the hill, and disappeared into the wood and shrubbery that veiled it. There were a few straggling shots, by whom fired, or with what effect, was invisible, and meanwhile the main body of the enemy proceeded along the road. They had now advanced so nigh that Septimius was strangely assailed by the idea that he might, with the gun in his hand, fire right into the midst of them, and select any man of that now hostile band to be a victim. How strange, how strange it is, this deep, wild passion that nature has implanted in us to be the death of our fellow creatures, and which co-exists at the same time with horror ! Septimius levelled his weapon, and drew it up again ; he marked a mounted officer, who seemed to be in chief command, whom he knew that he could

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

kill. But no! he had really no such purpose. Only it was such a temptation. And in a moment the horse would leap, the officer would fall and lie there in the dust of the road, bleeding, gasping, breathing in spasms, breathing no more.

While the young man, in these unusual circumstances, stood watching the marching of the troops, he heard the noise of rustling boughs and the voices of men, and soon understood that the party, which he had seen separate itself from the main body and ascend the hill, was now marching along on the hilltop, the long ridge which, with a gap or two, extended as much as a mile from the village. One of these gaps occurred a little way from where Septimius stood. They were acting as flank guard, to prevent the uproused people from coming so close to the main body as to fire upon it. He looked and saw that the detachment of British was plunging down one side of this gap, with intent to ascend the other, so that they would pass directly over the spot where he stood; a slight removal to one side, among the small bushes, would conceal him. He stepped aside, accordingly, and from his concealment, not without drawing quicker breaths, beheld the party draw near. They were more intent upon the space between them and the main body than upon the dense thicket of birch-trees, pitch pines, sumach,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and dwarf oaks, which, scarcely yet beginning to bud into leaf, lay on the other side, and in which Septimius lurked.

[Describe how their faces affected him, passing so near ; how strange they seemed.]

They had all passed, except an officer who brought up the rear, and who had perhaps been attracted by some slight motion that Septimius made, — some rustle in the thicket ; for he stopped, fixed his eyes piercingly towards the spot where he stood, and levelled a light fusil which he carried. “Stand out, or I shoot,” said he.

Not to avoid the shot, but because his manhood felt a call upon it not to skulk in obscurity from an open enemy, Septimius at once stood forth, and confronted the same handsome young officer with whom those fierce words had passed on account of his rudeness to Rose Garfield. Septimius’s fierce Indian blood stirred in him, and gave a murderous excitement.

“Ah, it is you !” said the young officer, with a haughty smile. “You meant, then, to take up with my hint of shooting at me from behind a hedge ? This is better. Come, we have in the first place the great quarrel between me, a king’s soldier, and you, a rebel ; next our private affair, on account of yonder pretty girl. Come, let us take a shot on either score !”

The young officer was so handsome, so beau-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tiful, in budding youth ; there was such a free, gay petulance in his manner ; there seemed so little of real evil in him ; he put himself on equal ground with the rustic Septimius so generously, that the latter, often so morbid and sullen, never felt a greater kindness for fellow man than at this moment for this youth.

“I have no enmity towards you,” said he ; “go in peace.”

“No enmity !” replied the officer. “Then why were you here with your gun amongst the shrubbery ? But I have a mind to do my first deed of arms on you ; so give up your weapon, and come with me as prisoner.”

“A prisoner !” cried Septimius, that Indian fierceness that was in him arousing itself, and thrusting up its malign head like a snake. “Never ! If you would have me, you must take my dead body.”

“Ah well, you have pluck in you, I see ; only it needs a considerable stirring. Come, this is a good quarrel of ours. Let us fight it out. Stand where you are, and I will give the word of command. Now ; ready, aim, fire !”

As the young officer spoke the three last words, in rapid succession, he and his antagonist brought their firelocks to the shoulder, aimed and fired. Septimius felt, as it were, the sting of a gadfly passing across his temple, as the Englishman’s bullet grazed it ; but, to his surprise

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and horror (for the whole thing scarcely seemed real to him), he saw the officer give a great start, drop his fusil, and stagger against a tree, with his hand to his breast. He endeavored to support himself erect, but, failing in the effort, beckoned to Septimius.

"Come, my good friend," said he, with that playful, petulant smile flitting over his face again. "It is my first and last fight. Let me down as softly as you can on mother earth, the mother of both you and me; so we are brothers; and this may be a brotherly act, though it does not look so, nor feel so. Ah! that was a twinge indeed!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Septimius. "I had no thought of this, no malice towards you in the least!"

"Nor I towards you," said the young man. "It was boy's play, and the end of it is that I die a boy, instead of living forever, as perhaps I otherwise might."

"Living forever!" repeated Septimius, his attention arrested, even at that breathless moment, by words that rang so strangely on what had been his brooding thought.

"Yes; but I have lost my chance," said the young officer. Then, as Septimius helped him to lie against the little hillock of a decayed and buried stump, "Thank you; thank you. If you could only call back one of my comrades

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

to hear my dying words. But I forgot. You have killed me, and they would take your life."

In truth, Septimius was so moved and so astonished, that he probably would have called back the young man's comrades, had it been possible; but, marching at the swift rate of men in peril, they had already gone far onward, in their passage through the shrubbery that had ceased to rustle behind them.

"Yes; I must die here!" said the young man, with a forlorn expression, as of a schoolboy far away from home, "and nobody to see me now but you, who have killed me. Could you fetch me a drop of water? I have a great thirst."

Septimius, in a dream of horror and pity, rushed down the hillside; the house was empty, for Aunt Keziah had gone for shelter and sympathy to some of the neighbors. He filled a jug with cold water, and hurried back to the hilltop, finding the young officer looking paler and more deathlike within those few moments.

"I thank you, my enemy that was, my friend that is," murmured he, faintly smiling. "Methinks, next to the father and mother that gave us birth, the next most intimate relation must be with the man that slays us, who introduces us to the mysterious world to which this is but the portal. You and I are singularly connected, doubt it not, in the scenes of the unknown world."

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“ O, believe me,” cried Septimius, “ I grieve for you like a brother ! ”

“ I see it, my dear friend,” said the young officer ; “ and though my blood is on your hands, I forgive you freely, if there is anything to forgive. But I am dying, and have a few words to say, which you must hear. You have slain me in fair fight, and my spoils, according to the rules and customs of warfare, belong to the victor. Hang up my sword and fusil over your chimney place, and tell your children, twenty years hence, how they were won. My purse, keep it or give it to the poor. There is something, here next my heart, which I would fain have sent to the address which I will give you.”

Septimius, obeying his directions, took from his breast a miniature that hung round it ; but, on examination, it proved that the bullet had passed directly through it, shattering the ivory, so that the woman’s face it represented was quite destroyed.

“ Ah ! that is a pity,” said the young man ; and yet Septimius thought that there was something light and contemptuous mingled with the pathos in his tones. “ Well, but send it ; cause it to be transmitted, according to the address.”

He gave Septimius, and made him take down on a tablet which he had about him, the name of a hall in one of the midland counties of England.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“ Ah, that old place,” said he, “ with its oaks, and its lawn, and its park, and its Elizabethan gables ! I little thought I should die here, so far away, in this barren Yankee land. Where will you bury me ? ”

As Septimius hesitated to answer, the young man continued : “ I would like to have lain in the little old church at Whitnash, which comes up before me now, with its low, gray tower, and the old yew-tree in front, hollow with age, and the village clustering about it, with its thatched houses. I would be loath to lie in one of your Yankee graveyards, for I have a distaste for them,—though I love you, my slayer. Bury me here, on this very spot. A soldier lies best where he falls.”

“ Here, in secret ? ” exclaimed Septimius.

“ Yes ; there is no consecration in your Puritan burial grounds,” said the dying youth, some of that queer narrowness of English Churchism coming into his mind. “ So bury me here, in my soldier’s dress. Ah ! and my watch ! I have done with time, and you, perhaps, have a long lease of it ; so take it, not as spoil, but as my parting gift. And that reminds me of one other thing. Open that pocketbook which you have in your hand.”

Septimius did so, and by the officer’s direction took from one of its compartments a folded paper, closely written in a crabbed hand ; it was

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

considerably worn in the outer folds, but not within. There was also a small silver key in the pocketbook.

“I leave it with you,” said the officer; “it was given me by an uncle, a learned man of science, who intended me great good by what he there wrote. Reap the profit, if you can. Sooth to say, I never read beyond the first lines of the paper.”

Septimius was surprised, or deeply impressed, to see that through this paper, as well as through the miniature, had gone his fatal bullet,—straight through the midst; and some of the young man’s blood, saturating his dress, had wet the paper all over. He hardly thought himself likely to derive any good from what it had cost a human life, taken (however uncriminally) by his own hands, to obtain.

“Is there anything more that I can do for you?” asked he, with genuine sympathy and sorrow, as he knelt by his fallen foe’s side.

“Nothing, nothing, I believe,” said he. “There was one thing I might have confessed; if there were a holy man here, I might have confessed, and asked his prayers; for though I have lived few years, it has been long enough to do a great wrong. But I will try to pray in my secret soul. Turn my face towards the trunk of the tree, for I have taken my last look at the world. There, let me be now.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Septimius did as the young man requested, and then stood leaning against one of the neighboring pines, watching his victim with a tender concern that made him feel as if the convulsive throes that passed through his frame were felt equally in his own. There was a murmuring from the youth's lips which seemed to Septimius swift, soft, and melancholy, like the voice of a child when it has some naughtiness to confess to its mother at bedtime; contrite, pleading, yet trusting. So it continued for a few minutes; then there was a sudden start and struggle, as if he were striving to rise; his eyes met those of Septimius with a wild, troubled gaze, but as the latter caught him in his arms he was dead. Septimius laid the body softly down on the leaf-strewn earth, and tried, as he had heard was the custom with the dead, to compose the features distorted by the dying agony. He then flung himself on the ground at a little distance, and gave himself up to the reflections suggested by the strange occurrences of the last hour.

He had taken a human life; and, however the circumstances might excuse him, — might make the thing even something praiseworthy, and that would be called patriotic, — still, it was not at once that a fresh country youth could see anything but horror in the blood with which his hand was stained. It seemed so dreadful to have reduced this gay, animated, beautiful being to a

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

lump of dead flesh for the flies to settle upon, and which in a few hours would begin to decay ; which must be put forthwith into the earth, lest it should be a horror to men's eyes ; that delicious beauty for woman to love ; that strength and courage to make him famous among men, — all come to nothing ; all probabilities of life in one so gifted ; the renown, the position, the pleasures, the profits, the keen ecstatic joy, — this never could be made up, — all ended quite ; for the dark doubt descended upon Septimius, that, because of the very fitness that was in this youth to enjoy this world, so much the less chance was there of his being fit for any other world. What could it do for him there, — this beautiful grace and elegance of feature, — where there was no form, nothing tangible nor visible ? what good that readiness and aptness for associating with all created things, doing his part, acting, enjoying, when, under the changed conditions of another state of being, all this adaptedness would fail ? Had he been gifted with permanence on earth, there could not have been a more admirable creature than this young man ; but as his fate had turned out, he was a mere grub, an illusion, something that nature had held out in mockery, and then withdrawn. A weed might grow from his dust now ; that little spot on the barren hilltop, where he had desired to be buried, would be greener for some years to come,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and that was all the difference. Septimius could not get beyond the earthiness ; his feeling was as if, by an act of violence, he had forever cut off a happy human existence. And such was his own love of life and clinging to it, peculiar to dark, sombre natures, and which lighter and gayer ones can never know, that he shuddered at his deed, and at himself, and could with difficulty bear to be alone with the corpse of his victim, — trembled at the thought of turning his face towards him.

Yet he did so, because he could not endure the imagination that the dead youth was turning his eyes towards him as he lay ; so he came and stood beside him, looking down into his white, upturned face. But it was wonderful ! What a change had come over it since, only a few moments ago, he looked at that death-contorted countenance ! Now there was a high and sweet expression upon it, of great joy and surprise, and yet a quietude diffused throughout, as if the peace being so very great was what had surprised him. The expression was like a light gleaming and glowing within him. Septimius had often, at a certain space of time after sunset, looking westward, seen a living radiance in the sky, — the last light of the dead day that seemed just the counterpart of this death light in the young man's face. It was as if the youth were just at the gate of heaven, which, swinging

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

softly open, let the inconceivable glory of the blessed city shine upon his face, and kindle it up with gentle, undisturbing astonishment and purest joy. It was an expression contrived by God's providence to comfort ; to overcome all the dark auguries that the physical ugliness of death inevitably creates, and to prove by the divine glory on the face, that the ugliness is a delusion. It was as if the dead man himself showed his face out of the sky, with heaven's blessing on it, and bade the afflicted be of good cheer, and believe in immortality.

Septimius remembered the young man's injunctions to bury him there, on the hill, without uncovering the body ; and though it seemed a sin and shame to cover up that beautiful body with earth of the grave, and give it to the worm, yet he resolved to obey.

Be it confessed that, beautiful as the dead form looked, and guiltless as Septimius must be held in causing his death, still he felt as if he should be eased when it was under the ground. He hastened down to the house, and brought up a shovel and a pickaxe, and began his unwonted task of grave-digging, delving earnestly a deep pit, sometimes pausing in his toil, while the sweat drops poured from him, to look at the beautiful clay that was to occupy it. Sometimes he paused, too, to listen to the shots that pealed in the far distance, towards the east,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

whither the battle had long since rolled out of reach and almost out of hearing. It seemed to have gathered about itself the whole life of the land, attending it along its bloody course in a struggling throng of shouting, shooting men, so still and solitary was everything left behind it. It seemed the very midland solitude of the world where Septimius was delving at the grave. He and his dead were alone together, and he was going to put the body under the sod, and be quite alone.

The grave was now deep, and Septimius was stooping down into its depths among dirt and pebbles, levelling off the bottom, which he considered to be profound enough to hide the young man's mystery forever, when a voice spoke above him ; a solemn, quiet voice, which he knew well.

"Septimius ! what are you doing here ?"

He looked up and saw the minister.

"I have slain a man in fair fight," answered he, "and am about to bury him as he requested. I am glad you are come. You, reverend sir, can fitly say a prayer at his obsequies. I am glad for my own sake ; for it is very lonely and terrible to be here."

He climbed out of the grave, and, in reply to the minister's inquiries, communicated to him the events of the morning, and the youth's strange wish to be buried here, without having

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

his remains subjected to the hands of those who would prepare it for the grave. The minister hesitated.

"At an ordinary time," said he, "such a singular request would of course have to be refused. Your own safety, the good and wise rules that make it necessary that all things relating to death and burial should be done publicly and in order, would forbid it."

"Yes," replied Septimius; "but, it may be, scores of men will fall to-day, and be flung into hasty graves without funeral rites; without its ever being known, perhaps, what mother has lost her son. I cannot but think that I ought to perform the dying request of the youth whom I have slain. He trusted in me not to uncover his body myself, nor to betray it to the hands of others."

"A singular request," said the good minister, gazing with deep interest at the beautiful dead face, and graceful, slender, manly figure. "What could have been its motive? But no matter. I think, Septimius, that you are bound to obey his request; indeed, having promised him, nothing short of an impossibility should prevent your keeping your faith. Let us lose no time, then."

With few but deeply solemn rites the young stranger was laid by the minister and the youth who slew him in his grave. A prayer was made,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and then Septimius, gathering some branches and twigs, spread them over the face that was turned upward from the bottom of the pit, into which the sun gleamed downward, throwing its rays so as almost to touch it. The twigs partially hid it, but still its white shone through. Then the minister threw a handful of earth upon it, and, accustomed as he was to burials, tears fell from his eyes along with the mould.

“It is sad,” said he, “this poor young man, coming from opulence, no doubt, a dear English home, to die here for no end, one of the first fruits of a bloody war, — so much privately sacrificed. But let him rest, Septimius. I am sorry that he fell by your hand, though it involves no shadow of a crime. But death is a thing too serious not to melt into the nature of a man like you.”

“It does not weigh upon my conscience, I think,” said Septimius; “though I cannot but feel sorrow, and wish my hand were as clean as yesterday. It is, indeed, a dreadful thing to take human life.”

“It is a most serious thing,” replied the minister; “but perhaps we are apt to overestimate the importance of death at any particular moment. If the question were whether to die or to live forever, then, indeed, scarcely anything should justify the putting a fellow creature to death. But since it only shortens his earthly

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

life, and brings a little forward a change which, since God permits it, is, we may conclude, as fit to take place then as at any other time, it alters the case. I often think that there are many things that occur to us in our daily life, many unknown crises, that are more important to us than this mysterious circumstance of death, which we deem the most important of all. All we understand of it is, that it takes the dead person away from our knowledge of him, which, while we live with him, is so very scanty."

"You estimate at nothing, it seems, his earthly life, which might have been so happy."

"At next to nothing," said the minister, "since, as I have observed, it must, at any rate, have closed so soon."

Septimius thought of what the young man, in his last moments, had said of his prospect or opportunity of living a life of interminable length, and which prospect he had bequeathed to himself. But of this he did not speak to the minister, being, indeed, ashamed to have it supposed that he would put any serious weight on such a bequest, although it might be that the dark enterprise of his nature had secretly seized upon this idea, and, though yet sane enough to be influenced by a fear of ridicule, was busy incorporating it with his thoughts.

So Septimius smoothed down the young stranger's earthy bed, and returned to his home,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

where he hung up the sword over the mantel-piece in his study, and hung the gold watch, too, on a nail, — the first time he had ever had possession of such a thing. Nor did he now feel altogether at ease in his mind about keeping it, — the time-measurer of one whose mortal life he had cut off. A splendid watch it was, round as a turnip. There seems to be a natural right in one who has slain a man to step into his vacant place in all respects ; and from the beginning of man's dealings with man this right has been practically recognized, whether among warriors or robbers, as paramount to every other. Yet Septimius could not feel easy in availing himself of this right. He therefore resolved to keep the watch, and even the sword and fusil, — which were less questionable spoils of war, — only till he should be able to restore them to some representative of the young officer. The contents of the purse, in accordance with the request of the dying youth, he would expend in relieving the necessities of those whom the war (now broken out, and of which no one could see the limit) might put in need of it. The miniature, with its broken and shattered face, that had so vainly interposed itself between its wearer and death, had been sent to its address.

But as to the mysterious document, the written paper, that he had laid aside without unfolding it, but with a care that betokened more

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

interest in it than in either gold or weapon, or even in the golden representative of that earthly time on which he set so high a value. There was something tremulous in his touch of it; it seemed as if he were afraid of it by the mode in which he hid it away, and secured himself from it, as it were.

This done, the air of the room, the low-ceilinged eastern room where he studied and thought, became too close for him, and he hastened out; for he was full of the unshaped sense of all that had befallen, and the perception of the great public event of a broken-out war was intermixed with that of what he had done personally in the great struggle that was beginning. He longed, too, to know what was the news of the battle that had gone rolling onward along the hitherto peaceful country road, converting everywhere (this demon of war, we mean), with one blast of its red sulphurous breath, the peaceful husbandman to a soldier thirsting for blood. He turned his steps, therefore, towards the village, thinking it probable that news must have arrived either of defeat or victory, from messengers or fliers, to cheer or sadden the old men, the women, and the children, who alone perhaps remained there.

But Septimius did not get to the village. As he passed along by the cottage that has been already described, Rose Garfield was standing

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

at the door, peering anxiously forth to know what was the issue of the conflict, — as it has been woman's fate to do from the beginning of the world, and is so still. Seeing Septimius, she forgot the restraint that she had hitherto kept herself under, and, flying at him like a bird, she cried out, "Septimius, dear Septimius, where have you been? What news do you bring? You look as if you had seen some strange and dreadful thing."

"Ah, is it so? Does my face tell such stories?" exclaimed the young man. "I did not mean it should. Yes, Rose, I have seen and done such things as change a man in a moment."

"Then you have been in this terrible fight," said Rose.

"Yes, Rose, I have had my part in it," answered Septimius.

He was on the point of relieving his overburdened mind by telling her what had happened no farther off than on the hill above them; but, seeing her excitement, and recollecting her own momentary interview with the young officer, and the forced intimacy and link that had been established between them by the kiss, he feared to agitate her further by telling her that that gay and beautiful young man had since been slain, and deposited in a bloody grave by his hands. And yet the recollection of that kiss

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

caused a thrill of vengeful joy at the thought that the perpetrator had since expiated his offence with his life, and that it was himself that did it, so deeply was Septimius's Indian nature of revenge and blood incorporated with that of more peaceful forefathers, although Septimius had grace enough to chide down that bloody spirit, feeling that it made him, not a patriot, but a murderer.

"Ah," said Rose, shuddering, "it is awful when we must kill one another! And who knows where it will end?"

"With me it will end here, Rose," said Septimius. "It may be lawful for any man, even if he have devoted himself to God, or however peaceful his pursuits, to fight to the death when the enemy's step is on the soil of his home; but only for that perilous juncture, which passed, he should return to his own way of peace. I have done a terrible thing for once, dear Rose, one that might well trace a dark line through all my future life; but henceforth I cannot think it my duty to pursue any further a work for which my studies and my nature unfit me."

"O no! O no!" said Rose; "never! and you a minister, or soon to be one. There must be some peacemakers left in the world, or everything will turn to blood and confusion; for even women grow dreadfully fierce in these times. My old grandmother laments her bedridden-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ness, because, she says, she cannot go to cheer on the people against the enemy. But she remembers the old times of the Indian wars, when the women were as much in danger of death as the men, and so were almost as fierce as they, and killed men sometimes with their own hands. But women, nowadays, ought to be gentler ; let the men be fierce, if they must, except you, and such as you, Septimius."

"Ah, dear Rose," said Septimius, "I have not the kind and sweet impulses that you speak of. I need something to soften and warm my cold, hard life ; something to make me feel how dreadful this time of warfare is. I need you, dear Rose, who are all kindness of heart and mercy."

And here Septimius, hurried away by I know not what excitement of the time, — the disturbed state of the country, his own ebullition of passion, the deed he had done, the desire to press one human being close to his life, because he had shed the blood of another, his half-formed purposes, his shapeless impulses ; in short, being affected by the whole stir of his nature, — spoke to Rose of love, and with an energy that, indeed, there was no resisting when once it broke bounds. And Rose, whose maiden thoughts, to say the truth, had long dwelt upon this young man, — admiring him for a certain dark beauty, knowing him familiarly from child-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

hood, and yet having the sense, that is so bewitching, of remoteness, intermixed with intimacy, because he was so unlike herself ; having a woman's respect for scholarship, her imagination the more impressed by all in him that she could not comprehend, — Rose yielded to his impetuous suit, and gave him the troth that he requested. And yet it was with a sort of reluctance and drawing back ; her whole nature, her secretest heart, her deepest womanhood, perhaps, did not consent. There was something in Septimius, in his wild, mixed nature, the monstrosousness that had grown out of his hybrid race, the black infusions, too, which melancholic men had left there, the devilishness that had been symbolized in the popular regard about his family, that made her shiver, even while she came the closer to him for that very dread. And when he gave her the kiss of betrothment her lips grew white. If it had not been in the day of turmoil, if he had asked her in any quiet time, when Rose's heart was in its natural mood, it may well be that, with tears and pity for him, and half-pity for herself, Rose would have told Septimius that she did not think she could love him well enough to be his wife.

And how was it with Septimius ? Well, there was a singular correspondence in his feelings to those of Rose Garfield. At first, carried away

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

by a passion that seized him all unawares, and seemed to develop itself all in a moment, he felt, and so spoke to Rose, so pleaded his suit, as if his whole earthly happiness depended on her consent to be his bride. It seemed to him that her love would be the sunshine in the gloomy dungeon of his life. But when her bashful, downcast, tremulous consent was given, then immediately came a strange misgiving into his mind. He felt as if he had taken to himself something good and beautiful doubtless in itself, but which might be the exchange for one more suited to him, that he must now give up. The intellect, which was the prominent point in Septimius, stirred and heaved, crying out vaguely that its own claims, perhaps, were ignored in this contract. Septimius had perhaps no right to love at all ; if he did, it should have been a woman of another make, who could be his intellectual companion and helper. And then, perchance, — perchance, — there was destined for him some high, lonely path, in which, to make any progress, to come to any end, he must walk unburdened by the affections. Such thoughts as these depressed and chilled (as many men have found them, or similar ones, to do) the moment of success that should have been the most exulting in the world. And so, in the kiss which these two lovers had exchanged there was, after all, something that repelled ; and

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

when they parted they wondered at their strange states of mind, but would not acknowledge that they had done a thing that ought not to have been done. Nothing is surer, however, than that, if we suffer ourselves to be drawn into too close proximity with people, if we overestimate the degree of our proper tendency towards them, or theirs towards us, a reaction is sure to follow.

Septimius quitted Rose, and resumed his walk towards the village. But now it was near sunset, and there began to be straggling passengers along the road, some of whom came slowly, as if they had received hurts; all seemed wearied. Among them one form appeared which Rose soon found that she recognized. It was Robert Hagburn, with a shattered firelock in his hand, broken at the butt, and his left arm bound with a fragment of his shirt, and suspended in a handkerchief; and he walked weariedly, but brightened up at sight of Rose, as if ashamed to let her see how exhausted and dispirited he was. Perhaps he expected a smile, at least a more earnest reception than he met; for Rose, with the restraint of what had recently passed drawing her back, merely went gravely a few steps to meet him, and said, "Robert, how tired and pale you look! Are you hurt?"

"It is of no consequence," replied Robert

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Hagburn; "a scratch on my left arm from an officer's sword, with whose head my gunstock made instant acquaintance. It is no matter, Rose; you do not care for it, nor do I either."

"How can you say so, Robert?" she replied. But without more greeting he passed her, and went into his own house, where, flinging himself into a chair, he remained in that despondency that men generally feel after a fight, even if a successful one.

Septimius, the next day, lost no time in writing a letter to the direction given him by the young officer, conveying a brief account of the latter's death and burial, and a signification that he held in readiness to give up certain articles of property, at any future time, to his representatives, mentioning also the amount of money contained in the purse, and his intention, in compliance with the verbal will of the deceased, to expend it in alleviating the wants of prisoners. Having so done, he went up on the hill to look at the grave, and satisfy himself that the scene there had not been a dream; a point which he was inclined to question, in spite of the tangible evidence of the sword and watch, which still hung over the mantelpiece. There was the little mound, however, looking so incontrovertibly a grave, that it seemed to him as if all the world must see it, and wonder at the fact of its being there, and spend their wits in

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

conjecturing who slept within ; and, indeed, it seemed to give the affair a questionable character, this secret burial, and he wondered and wondered why the young man had been so earnest about it. Well, there was the grave ; and, moreover, on the leafy earth, where the dying youth had lain, there were traces of blood, which no rain had yet washed away. Septimius wondered at the easiness with which he acquiesced in this deed ; in fact, he felt in a slight degree the effects of that taste of blood, which makes the slaying of men, like any other abuse, sometimes become a passion. Perhaps it was his Indian trait stirring in him again ; at any rate, it is not delightful to observe how readily man becomes a blood-shedding animal.

Looking down from the hilltop, he saw the little dwelling of Rose Garfield, and caught a glimpse of the girl herself, passing the windows or the door, about her household duties, and listened to hear the singing which usually broke out of her. But Rose, for some reason or other, did not warble as usual this morning. She trod about silently, and somehow or other she was translated out of the ideality in which Septimius usually enveloped her, and looked little more than a New England girl, very pretty indeed, but not enough so, perhaps, to engross a man's life and higher purposes into her own narrow circle ; so, at least, Septimius thought.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Looking a little farther, — down into the green recess where stood Robert Hagburn's house, — he saw that young man, looking very pale, with his arm in a sling, sitting listlessly on a half-chopped log of wood which was not likely soon to be severed by Robert's axe. Like other lovers, Septimius had not failed to be aware that Robert Hagburn was sensible to Rose Garfield's attractions; and now, as he looked down on them both from his elevated position, he wondered if it would not have been better for Rose's happiness if her thoughts and virgin fancies had settled on that frank, cheerful, able, wholesome young man, instead of on himself, who met her on so few points; and in relation to whom there was perhaps a plant, that had its root in the grave, that would entwine itself around his whole life, overshadowing it with dark, rich foliage and fruit that he alone could feast upon.

For the sombre imagination of Septimius, though he kept it as much as possible away from the subject, still kept hinting and whispering, still coming back to the point, still secretly suggesting that the event of yesterday was to have momentous consequences upon his fate.

He had not yet looked at the paper which the young man bequeathed to him; he had laid it away unopened; not that he felt little interest in it, but, on the contrary, because he

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

looked for some blaze of light which had been reserved for him alone. The young officer had been only the bearer of it to him, and he had come hither to die by his hand, because that was the readiest way by which he could deliver his message. How else, in the infinite chances of human affairs, could the document have found its way to its destined possessor? Thus mused Septimius, pacing to and fro on the level edge of his hilltop, apart from the world, looking down occasionally into it, and seeing its love and interest away from him; while Rose, it might be, looking upward, saw occasionally his passing figure, and trembled at the nearness and remoteness that existed between them; and Robert Hagburn looked too, and wondered what manner of man it was who, having won Rose Garfield (for his instinct told him this was so), could keep that distance between her and him, thinking remote thoughts.

Yes; there was Septimius treading a path of his own on the hilltop; his feet began only that morning to wear it in his walking to and fro, sheltered from the lower world, except in occasional glimpses, by the birches and locusts that threw up their foliage from the hillside. But many a year thereafter he continued to tread that path, till it was worn deep with his footsteps and trodden down hard; and it was believed by some of his superstitious neighbors

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

that the grass and little shrubs shrank away from his path, and made it wider on that account; because there was something in the broodings that urged him to and fro along the path alien to nature and its productions. There was another opinion, too, that an invisible fiend, one of his relatives by blood, walked side by side with him, and so made the pathway wider than his single footsteps could have made it. But all this was idle, and was, indeed, only the foolish babble that hovers like a mist about men who withdraw themselves from the throng, and involve themselves in unintelligible pursuits and interests of their own. For the present, the small world, which alone knew of him, considered Septimius as a studious young man, who was fitting for the ministry, and was likely enough to do credit to the ministerial blood that he drew from his ancestors, in spite of the wild stream that the Indian priest had contributed; and perhaps none the worse, as a clergyman, for having an instinctive sense of the nature of the Devil from his traditionary claims to partake of his blood. But what strange interest there is in tracing out the first steps by which we enter on a career that influences our life! and this deep-worn pathway on the hilltop, passing and repassing by a grave, seemed to symbolize it in Septimius's case.

I suppose the morbidness of Septimius's dis-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

position was excited by the circumstances which had put the paper into his possession. Had he received it by post, it might not have impressed him; he might possibly have looked over it with ridicule, and tossed it aside. But he had taken it from a dying man, and he felt that his fate was in it; and truly it turned out to be so. He waited for a fit opportunity to open it and read it; he put it off as if he cared nothing about it; perhaps it was because he cared so much. Whenever he had a happy time with Rose (and, moody as Septimius was, such happy moments came), he felt that then was not the time to look into the paper, — it was not to be read in a happy mood.

Once he asked Rose to walk with him on the hilltop.

“Why, what a path you have worn here, Septimius!” said the girl. “You walk miles and miles on this one spot, and get no farther on than when you started. That is strange walking!”

“I don’t know, Rose; I sometimes think I get a little onward. But it is sweeter—yes, much sweeter, I find—to have you walking on this path here than to be treading it alone.”

“I am glad of that,” said Rose; “for sometimes, when I look up here, and see you through the branches, with your head bent down, and your hands clasped behind you,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

treading, treading, treading, always in one way, I wonder whether I am at all in your mind. I don't think, Septimius," added she, looking up in his face and smiling, "that ever a girl had just such a young man for a lover."

"No young man ever had such a girl, I am sure," said Septimius; "so sweet, so good for him, so prolific of good influences!"

"Ah, it makes me think well of myself to bring such a smile into your face! But, Septimius, what is this little hillock here so close to our path? Have you heaped it up here for a seat? Shall we sit down upon it for an instant? —for it makes me more tired to walk backward and forward on one path than to go straight forward a much longer distance."

"Well; but we will not sit down on this hillock," said Septimius, drawing her away from it. "Farther out this way, if you please, Rose, where we shall have a better view over the wide plain, the valley, and the long, tame ridge of hills on the other side, shutting it in like human life. It is a landscape that never tires, though it has nothing striking about it; and I am glad that there are no great hills to be thrusting themselves into my thoughts, and crowding out better things. It might be desirable, in some states of mind, to have a glimpse of water, — to have the lake that once must have

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

covered this green valley, — because water reflects the sky, and so is like religion in life, the spiritual element.”

“There is the brook running through it, though we do not see it,” replied Rose; “a torpid little brook, to be sure; but, as you say, it has heaven in its bosom, like Walden Pond, or any wider one.”

As they sat together on the hilltop, they could look down into Robert Hagburn’s enclosure, and they saw him, with his arm now relieved from the sling, walking about, in a very erect manner, with a middle-aged man by his side, to whom he seemed to be talking and explaining some matter. Even at that distance Septimius could see that the rustic stoop and uncouthness had somehow fallen away from Robert, and that he seemed developed.

“What has come to Robert Hagburn?” said he. “He looks like another man than the lout I knew a few weeks ago.”

“Nothing,” said Rose Garfield, “except what comes to a good many young men nowadays. He has enlisted, and is going to the war. It is a pity for his mother.”

“A great pity,” said Septimius. “Mothers are greatly to be pitied all over the country just now, and there are some even more to be pitied than the mothers, though many of them do not

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

know or suspect anything about their cause of grief at present."

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Rose.

"I mean those many good and sweet young girls," said Septimius, "who would have been happy wives to the thousands of young men who now, like Robert Hagburn, are going to the war. Those young men — many of them at least — will sicken and die in camp, or be shot down, or struck through with bayonets on battlefields, and turn to dust and bones; while the girls that would have loved them, and made happy firesides for them, will pine and wither, and tread along many sour and discontented years, and at last go out of life without knowing what life is. So you see, Rose, every shot that takes effect kills two at least, or kills one and worse than kills the other."

"No woman will live single on account of poor Robert Hagburn being shot," said Rose, with a change of tone; "for he would never be married were he to stay at home and plough the field."

"How can you tell that, Rose?" asked Septimius.

Rose did not tell how she came to know so much about Robert Hagburn's matrimonial purposes; but after this little talk it appeared as if something had risen up between them, — a sort of mist, a medium, in which their intimacy was

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

not increased; for the flow and interchange of sentiment was balked, and they took only one or two turns in silence along Septimius's trodden path. I don't know exactly what it was; but there are cases in which it is inscrutably revealed to persons that they have made a mistake in what is of the highest concern to them; and this truth often comes in the shape of a vague depression of the spirit, like a vapor settling down on a landscape; a misgiving, coming and going perhaps, a lack of perfect certainty. Whatever it was, Rose and Septimius had no more tender and playful words that day; and Rose soon went to look after her grandmother, and Septimius went and shut himself up in his study, after making an arrangement to meet Rose the next day.

Septimius shut himself up, and drew forth the document which the young officer, with that singular smile on his dying face, had bequeathed to him as the reward of his death. It was in a covering of folded parchment, right through which, as aforesaid, was a bullet hole and some stains of blood. Septimius unrolled the parchment cover, and found inside a manuscript, closely written in a crabbed hand; so crabbed, indeed, that Septimius could not at first read a word of it, nor even satisfy himself in what language it was written. There seemed to be Latin words, and some interspersed ones in

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Greek characters, and here and there he could doubtfully read an English sentence ; but, on the whole, it was an unintelligible mass, conveying somehow an idea that it was the fruit of vast labor and erudition, emanating from a mind very full of books, and grinding and pressing down the great accumulation of grapes that it had gathered from so many vineyards, and squeezing out rich viscid juices, — potent wine, — with which the reader might get drunk. Some of it, moreover, seemed, for the further mystification of the officer, to be written in cipher ; a needless precaution, it might seem, when the writer's natural chirography was so full of puzzle and bewilderment.

Septimius looked at this strange manuscript, and it shook in his hands as he held it before his eyes, so great was his excitement. Probably, doubtless, it was in a great measure owing to the way in which it came to him, with such circumstances of tragedy and mystery ; as if — so secret and so important was it — it could not be within the knowledge of two persons at once, and therefore it was necessary that one should die in the act of transmitting it to the hand of another, the destined possessor, inheritor, profiler by it. By the bloody hand, as all the great possessions in this world have been gained and inherited, he had succeeded to the legacy, the richest that mortal man ever could receive. He pored over

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

the inscrutable sentences, and wondered, when he should succeed in reading one, if it might summon up a subject-fiend, appearing with thunder and devilish demonstrations. And by what other strange chance had the document come into the hand of him who alone was fit to receive it? It seemed to Septimius, in his enthusiastic egotism, as if the whole chain of events had been arranged purposely for this end: a difference had come between two kindred peoples; a war had broken out; a young officer, with the traditions of an old family represented in his line, had marched, and had met with a peaceful student, who had been incited from high and noble motives to take his life; then came a strange, brief intimacy, in which his victim made the slayer his heir. All these chances, as they seemed, all these interferences of Providence, as they doubtless were, had been necessary in order to put this manuscript into the hands of Septimius, who now pored over it, and could not with certainty read one word!

But this did not trouble him, except for the momentary delay. Because he felt well assured that the strong, concentrated study that he would bring to it would remove all difficulties, as the rays of a lens melt stones; as the telescope pierces through densest light of stars, and resolves them into their individual brilliancies. He could afford to spend years upon it, if it

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

were necessary; but earnestness and application should do quickly the work of years.

Amid these musings he was interrupted by his Aunt Keziah; though generally observant enough of her nephew's studies, and feeling a sanctity in them, both because of his intending to be a minister and because she had a great reverence for learning, even if heathenish, this good old lady summoned Septimius somewhat peremptorily to chop wood for her domestic purposes. How strange it is, the way in which we are summoned from all high purposes by these little homely necessities! — all symbolizing the great fact that the earthly part of us, with its demands, takes up the greater portion of all our available force. So Septimius, grumbling and groaning, went to the woodshed and exercised himself for an hour as the old lady requested; and it was only by instinct that he worked, hardly conscious what he was doing. The whole of passing life seemed impertinent; or if, for an instant, it seemed otherwise, then his lonely speculations and plans seemed to become impalpable, and to have only the consistency of vapor, which his utmost concentration succeeded no further than to make into the likeness of absurd faces, mopping, mowing, and laughing at him.

But that sentence of mystic meaning shone out before him like a transparency, illuminated

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

in the darkness of his mind ; he determined to take it for his motto until he should be victorious in his quest. When he took his candle, to retire apparently to bed, he again drew forth the manuscript, and, sitting down by the dim light, tried vainly to read it ; but he could not as yet settle himself to concentrated and regular effort ; he kept turning the leaves of the manuscript, in the hope that some other illuminated sentence might gleam out upon him, as the first had done, and shed a light on the context around it ; and that then another would be discovered, with similar effect, until the whole document would thus be illuminated with separate stars of light, converging and concentrating in one radiance that should make the whole visible. But such was his bad fortune, not another word of the manuscript was he able to read that whole evening ; and, moreover, while he had still an inch of candle left, Aunt Keziah, in her nightcap, — as witch-like a figure as ever went to a wizard meeting in the forest with Septimius's ancestor, — appeared at the door of the room, aroused from her bed, and shaking her finger at him.

“ Septimius,” said she, “ you keep me awake, and you will ruin your eyes and turn your head, if you study till midnight in this manner. You 'll never live to be a minister, if this is the way you go on.”

“ Well, well, Aunt Keziah,” said Septimius,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

covering his manuscript with a book, "I am just going to bed now."

"Good-night, then," said the old woman ;
"and God bless your labors."

Strangely enough, a glance at the manuscript, as he hid it from the old woman, had seemed to Septimius to reveal another sentence, of which he had imperfectly caught the purport ; and when she had gone, he in vain sought the place, and vainly, too, endeavored to recall the meaning of what he had read. Doubtless his fancy exaggerated the importance of the sentence, and he felt as if it might have vanished from the book forever. In fact, the unfortunate young man, excited and tossed to and fro by a variety of unusual impulses, was got into a bad way, and was likely enough to go mad, unless the balancing portion of his mind proved to be of greater volume and effect than as yet appeared to be the case.

The next morning he was up, bright and early, poring over the manuscript with the sharpened wits of the new day, peering into its night, into its old, blurred, forgotten dream ; and, indeed, he had been dreaming about it, and was fully possessed with the idea that, in his dream, he had taken up the inscrutable document, and read it off as glibly as he would the page of a modern drama, in a continual rapture with the deep truth

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

that it made clear to his comprehension, and the lucid way in which it evolved the mode in which man might be restored to his originally undying state. So strong was the impression, that when he unfolded the manuscript, it was with almost the belief that the crabbed old handwriting would be plain to him. Such did not prove to be the case, however ; so far from it, that poor Septimius in vain turned over the yellow pages in quest of the one sentence which he had been able, or fancied he had been able, to read yesterday. The illumination that had brought it out was now faded, and all was a blur, an inscrutableness, a scrawl of unintelligible characters alike. So much did this affect him, that he had almost a mind to tear it into a thousand fragments, and scatter it out of the window to the west wind, that was then blowing past the house ; and if, in that summer season, there had been a fire on the hearth, it is possible that easy realization of a destructive impulse might have incited him to fling the accursed scrawl into the hottest of the flames, and thus returned it to the Devil, who, he suspected, was the original author of it. Had he done so, what strange and gloomy passages would I have been spared the pain of relating ! How different would have been the life of Septimius ! — a thoughtful preacher of God's word, taking severe but conscientious views of man's state and relations, a heavy-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

browed walker and worker on earth, and, finally, a slumberer in an honored grave, with an epitaph bearing testimony to his great usefulness in his generation.

But, in the meantime, here was the troublesome day passing over him, and pestering, bewildering, and tripping him up with its mere sublunary troubles, as the days will all of us the moment we try to do anything that we flatter ourselves is of a little more importance than others are doing. Aunt Keziah tormented him a great while about the rich field, just across the road, in front of the house, which Septimius had neglected the cultivation of, unwilling to spare the time to plough, to plant, to hoe it himself, but hired a lazy lout of the village, when he might just as well have employed and paid wages to the scarecrow which Aunt Keziah dressed out in ancient habiliments, and set up in the midst of the corn. Then came an old codger from the village, talking to Septimius about the war, — a theme of which he was weary : telling the rumor of skirmishes that the next day would prove to be false, of battles that were immediately to take place, of encounters with the enemy in which our side showed the valor of twentyfold heroes, but had to retreat ; babbling about shells and mortars, battalions, manœuvres, angles, fascines, and other items of military art ; for war had filled the whole brain of the people,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and enveloped the whole thought of man in a mist of gunpowder.

In this way, sitting on his doorstep, or in the very study, haunted by such speculations, this wretched old man would waste the better part of a summer afternoon, while Septimius listened, returning abstracted monosyllables, answering amiss, and wishing his persecutor jammed into one of the cannons he talked about, and fired off, to end his interminable babble in one roar; [talking] of great officers coming from France and other countries; of overwhelming forces from England, to put an end to the war at once; of the unlikelihood that it ever should be ended; of its hopelessness; of its certainty of a good and speedy end.

Then came limping along the lane a disabled soldier, begging his way home from the field, which, a little while ago, he had sought in the full vigor of rustic health he was never to know again; with whom Septimius had to talk, and relieve his wants as far as he could (though not from the poor young officer's deposit of English gold), and send him on his way.

Then came the minister to talk with his former pupil, about whom he had latterly had much meditation, not understanding what mood had taken possession of him; for the minister was a man of insight, and from conversations with Septimius, as searching as he knew how to

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

make them, he had begun to doubt whether he were sufficiently sound in faith to adopt the clerical persuasion. Not that he supposed him to be anything like a confirmed unbeliever ; but he thought it probable that these doubts, these strange, dark, disheartening suggestions of the Devil, that so surely infect certain temperaments and measures of intellect, were tormenting poor Septimius, and pulling him back from the path in which he was capable of doing so much good. So he came this afternoon to talk seriously with him, and to advise him, if the case were as he supposed, to get for a time out of the track of the thought in which he had so long been engaged ; to enter into active life ; and by and by, when the morbid influences should have been overcome by a change of mental and moral religion, he might return, fresh and healthy, to his original design.

“ What can I do,” asked Septimius gloomily, “ what business take up, when the whole land lies waste and idle, except for this war ? ”

“ There is the very business, then,” said the minister. “ Do you think God’s work is not to be done in the field as well as in the pulpit ? You are strong, Septimius, of a bold character, and have a mien and bearing that gives you a natural command among men. Go to the wars, and do a valiant part for your country, and come back to your peaceful mission when the enemy

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

has vanished. Or you might go as chaplain to a regiment, and use either hand in battle, — pray for success before a battle, help win it with sword or gun, and give thanks to God, kneeling on the bloody field, at its close. You have already stretched one foe on your native soil.”

Septimius could not but smile within himself at this warlike and bloody counsel ; and, joining it with some similar exhortations from Aunt Keziah, he was inclined to think that women and clergymen are, in matters of war, the most uncompromising and bloodthirsty of the community. However, he replied coolly, that his moral impulses and his feelings of duty did not exactly impel him in this direction, and that he was of opinion that war was a business in which a man could not engage with safety to his conscience, unless his conscience actually drove him into it ; and that this made all the difference between heroic battle and murderous strife. The good minister had nothing very effectual to answer to this, and took his leave, with a still stronger opinion than before that there was something amiss in his pupil's mind.

By this time, this thwarting day had gone on through its course of little and great impediments to his pursuit, — the discouragements of trifling and earthly business, of purely impertinent interruption, of severe and disheartening opposition from the powerful counteraction of

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

different kinds of mind, — until the hour had come at which he had arranged to meet Rose Garfield. I am afraid the poor thwarted youth did not go to his love tryst in any very amiable mood ; but rather, perhaps, reflecting how all things earthly and immortal, and love among the rest, whichever category, of earth or heaven, it may belong to, set themselves against man's progress in any pursuit that he seeks to devote himself to. It is one struggle, the moment he undertakes such a thing, of everything else in the world to impede him.

However, as it turned out, it was a pleasant and happy interview that he had with Rose that afternoon. The girl herself was in a happy, tuneful mood, and met him with such simplicity, threw such a light of sweetness over his soul, that Septimius almost forgot all the wild cares of the day, and walked by her side with a quiet fulness of pleasure that was new to him. She reconciled him, in some secret way, to life as it was, to imperfection, to decay ; without any help from her intellect, but through the influence of her character, she seemed, not to solve, but to smooth away, problems that troubled him ; merely by being, by womanhood, by simplicity, she interpreted God's ways to him ; she softened the stoniness that was gathering about his heart. And so they had a delightful time of talking, and laughing, and smelling the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

flowers ; and when they were parting, Septimius said to her : —

“ Rose, you have convinced me that this is a most happy world, and that Life has its two children, Birth and Death, and is bound to prize them equally ; and that God is very kind to his earthly children ; and that all will go well.”

“ And have I convinced you of all this ? ” replied Rose, with a pretty laughter. “ It is all true, no doubt, but I should not have known how to argue for it. But you are very sweet, and have not frightened me to-day.”

“ Do I ever frighten you, then, Rose ? ” asked Septimius, bending his black brow upon her with a look of surprise and displeasure.

“ Yes, sometimes,” said Rose, facing him with courage, and smiling upon the cloud so as to drive it away : “ when you frown upon me like that, I am a little afraid you will beat me, all in good time.”

“ Now,” said Septimius, laughing again, “ you shall have your choice : to be beaten on the spot, or suffer another kind of punishment, — which ? ”

So saying, he snatched her to him, and strove to kiss her, while Rose, laughing and struggling, cried out, “ The beating ! the beating ! ” But Septimius relented not, though it was only Rose’s cheek that he succeeded in touching. In

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

truth, except for that first one, at the moment of their plighted troths, I doubt whether Septimius ever touched those soft, sweet lips, where the smiles dwelt and the little pouts. He now returned to his study, and questioned with himself whether he should touch that weary, ugly, yellow, blurred, unintelligible, bewitched, mysterious, bullet-penetrated, blood-stained manuscript again. There was an undefinable reluctance to do so, and at the same time an enticement (irresistible, as it proved) drawing him towards it. He yielded, and taking it from his desk, in which the precious, fatal treasure was locked up, he plunged into it again, and this time with a certain degree of success. He found the line which had before gleamed out, and vanished again, and which now started out in strong relief; even as when sometimes we see a certain arrangement of stars in the heavens, and again lose it, by not seeing its individual stars in the same relation as before; even so, looking at the manuscript in a different way, Septimius saw this fragment of a sentence, and saw, moreover, what was necessary to give it a certain meaning. "Set the root in a grave, and wait for what shall blossom. It will be very rich, and full of juice." This was the purport, he now felt sure, of the sentence he had lighted upon; and he took it to refer to the mode of producing something that was essential to the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

thing to be concocted. It might have only a moral being ; or, as is generally the case, the moral and physical truth went hand in hand.

While Septimius was busying himself in this way, the summer advanced, and with it there appeared a new character, making her way into our pages. This was a slender and pale girl, whom Septimius was once startled to find, when he ascended his hilltop, to take his walk to and fro upon the accustomed path, which he had now worn deep.

What was stranger, she sat down close beside the grave, which none but he and the minister knew to be a grave ; that little hillock, which he had levelled a little, and had planted with various flowers and shrubs ; which the summer had fostered into richness, the poor young man below having contributed what he could, and tried to render them as beautiful as he might, in remembrance of his own beauty. Septimius wished to conceal the fact of its being a grave : not that he was tormented with any sense that he had done wrong in shooting the young man, which had been done in fair battle ; but still it was not the pleasantest of thoughts, that he had laid a beautiful human creature, so fit for the enjoyment of life, there, when his own dark brow, his own troubled breast, might better, he could not but acknowledge, have been covered up there. [*Perhaps there might sometimes be something fan-*

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tastically gay in the language and behavior of the girl.]

Well ; but then, on this flower and shrub disguised grave sat this unknown form of a girl, with a slender, pallid, melancholy grace about her, simply dressed in a dark attire, which she drew loosely about her. At first glimpse, Septimius fancied that it might be Rose ; but it needed only a glance to undeceive him ; her figure was of another character from the vigorous though slight and elastic beauty of Rose ; this was a drooping grace, and when he came near enough to see her face, he saw that those large, dark, melancholy eyes, with which she had looked at him, had never met his gaze before.

“ Good-morrow, fair maiden,” said Septimius, with such courtesy as he knew how to use (which, to say truth, was of a rustic order, his way of life having brought him little into female society). “ There is a nice air here on the hill-top, this sultry morning below the hill ! ”

As he spoke, he continued to look wonderingly at the strange maiden, half fancying that she might be something that had grown up out of the grave ; so unexpected she was, so simply unlike anything that had before come there.

The girl did not speak to him, but as she sat by the grave she kept weeding out the little white blades of faded autumn grass and yellow pine spikes, peering into the soil as if to see what it

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

was all made of, and everything that was growing there ; and in truth, whether by Septimius's care or no, there seemed to be several kinds of flowers, — those little asters that abound everywhere, and golden flowers, such as autumn supplies with abundance. She seemed to be in quest of something, and several times plucked a leaf and examined it carefully ; then threw it down again, and shook her head. At last she lifted up her pale face, and, fixing her eyes quietly on Septimius, spoke : “ It is not here ! ”

A very sweet voice it was, — plaintive, low, — and she spoke to Septimius as if she were familiar with him, and had something to do with him. He was greatly interested, not being able to imagine who the strange girl was, or whence she came, or what, of all things, could be her reason for coming and sitting down by this grave, and apparently botanizing upon it, in quest of some particular plant.

“ Are you in search of flowers ? ” asked Septimius. “ This is but a barren spot for them, and this is not a good season. In the meadows, and along the margin of the water courses, you might find the fringed gentian at this time. In the woods there are several pretty flowers, — the side-saddle flower, the anemone ; violets are plentiful in spring, and make the whole hillside blue. But this hilltop, with its soil strewn over a heap of pebblestones, is no place for flowers.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

"The soil is fit," said the maiden, "but the flower has not sprung up."

"What flower do you speak of?" asked Septimius.

"One that is not here," said the pale girl. "No matter. I will look for it again next spring."

"Do you, then, dwell hereabout?" inquired Septimius.

"Surely," said the maiden, with a look of surprise; "where else should I dwell? My home is on this hilltop."

It not a little startled Septimius, as may be supposed, to find his paternal inheritance, of which he and his forefathers had been the only owners since the world began (for they held it by an Indian deed), claimed as a home and abiding place by this fair, pale, strange-acting maiden, who spoke as if she had as much right there as if she had grown up out of the soil like one of the wild, indigenous flowers which she had been gazing at and handling. However that might be, the maiden seemed now about to depart, rising, giving a farewell touch or two to the little verdant hillock, which looked much the neater for her ministrations.

"Are you going?" said Septimius, looking at her in wonder.

"For a time," said she.

"And shall I see you again?" asked he.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“Surely,” said the maiden, “this is my walk, along the brow of the hill.”

It again smote Septimius with a strange thrill of surprise to find the walk which he himself had made, treading it, and smoothing it, and beating it down with the pressure of his continual feet, from the time when the tufted grass made the sides all uneven, until now, when it was such a pathway as you may see through a wood or over a field, where many feet pass every day, — to find this track and exemplification of his own secret thoughts and plans and emotions, this writing of his body, impelled by the struggle and movement of his soul, claimed as her own by a strange girl with melancholy eyes and voice, who seemed to have such a sad familiarity with him.

“You are welcome to come here,” said he, endeavoring at least to keep such hold on his own property as was implied in making a hospitable surrender of it to another.

“Yes,” said the girl, “a person should always be welcome to his own.”

A faint smile seemed to pass over her face as she said this, vanishing, however, immediately into the melancholy of her usual expression. She went along Septimius’s path, while he stood gazing at her till she reached the brow where it sloped towards Robert Hagburn’s house; then

· SEPTIMIUS FELTON

she turned, and seemed to wave a slight farewell towards the young man, and began to descend. When her figure had entirely sunk behind the brow of the hill, Septimius slowly followed along the ridge, meaning to watch from that elevated station the course she would take ; although, indeed, he would not have been surprised if he had seen nothing, no trace of her in the whole nearness or distance ; in short, if she had been a freak, an illusion, of a hard-working mind that had put itself ajar by deeply brooding on abstruse matters, an illusion of eyes that he had tried too much by poring over the inscrutable manuscript, and of intellect that was mystified and bewildered by trying to grasp things that could not be grasped. A thing of witchcraft, a sort of fungus growth out of the grave, an unsubstantiality altogether ; although, certainly, she had weeded the grave with bodily fingers, at all events. Still he had so much of the hereditary mysticism of his race in him, that he might have held her supernatural, only that on reaching the brow of the hill he saw her feet approach the dwelling of Robert Hagburn's mother, who, moreover, appeared at the threshold beckoning her to come, with a motherly, hospitable air, that denoted she knew the strange girl, and recognized her as human.

It did not lessen Septimius's surprise, however, to think that such a singular being was es-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tablished in the neighborhood without his knowledge ; considered as a real occurrence of this world, it seemed even more unaccountable than if it had been a thing of ghostology and witchcraft. Continually through the day the incident kept introducing its recollection among his thoughts and studies ; continually, as he paced along his path, this form seemed to hurry along by his side on the track that she had claimed for her own, and he thought of her singular threat or promise, whichever it were to be held, that he should have a companion there in future. In the decline of the day, when he met the schoolmistress coming home from her little seminary, he snatched the first opportunity to mention the apparition of the morning, and ask Rose if she knew anything of her.

“Very little,” said Rose ; “but she is flesh and blood, — of that you may be quite sure. She is a girl who has been shut up in Boston by the siege ; perhaps a daughter of one of the British officers, and her health being frail, she requires better air than they have there, and so permission was got for her, from General Washington, to come and live in the country ; as any one may see, our liberties have nothing to fear from this poor brain-stricken girl. And Robert Hagburn, having to bring a message from camp to the selectmen here, had it in charge to bring the girl, whom his mother has taken to board.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

"Then the poor thing is crazy?" asked Septimius.

"A little brain-touched, that is all," replied Rose, "owing to some grief that she has had; but she is quite harmless, Robert was told to say, and needs little or no watching, and will get a kind of fantastic happiness for herself, if only she is allowed to ramble about at her pleasure. If thwarted, she might be very wild and miserable."

"Have you spoken with her?" asked Septimius.

"A word or two this morning, as I was going to my school," said Rose. "She took me by the hand, and smiled, and said we would be friends, and that I should show her where the flowers grew; for that she had a little spot of her own that she wanted to plant with them. And she asked me if the *Sanguinea sanguinissima* grew hereabout. I should not have taken her to be ailing in her wits, only for a kind of free-spokenness and familiarity, as if we had been acquainted a long while; or as if she had lived in some country where there are no forms and impediments in people's getting acquainted."

"Did you like her?" inquired Septimius.

"Yes; almost loved her at first sight," answered Rose, "and I hope may do her some little good, poor thing, being of her own age, and the only companion, hereabouts, whom she

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

is likely to find. But she has been well educated, and is a lady, that is easy to see."

"It is very strange," said Septimius, "but I fear I shall be a good deal interrupted in my thoughts and studies, if she insists on haunting my hilltop as much as she tells me. My meditations are perhaps of a little too much importance to be shoved aside for the sake of gratifying a crazy girl's fantasies."

"Ah, that is a hard thing to say!" exclaimed Rose, shocked at her lover's cold egotism, though not giving it that title. "Let the poor thing glide quietly along in the path, though it be yours. Perhaps, after a while, she will help your thoughts."

"My thoughts," said Septimius, "are of a kind that can have no help from any one; if from any, it would only be from some wise, long-studied, and experienced scientific man, who could enlighten me as to the bases and foundation of things, as to mystic writings, as to chemical elements, as to the mysteries of language, as to the principles and system on which we were created. Methinks these are not to be taught me by a girl touched in the wits."

"I fear," replied Rose Garfield with gravity, and drawing imperceptibly apart from him, "that no woman can help you much. You despise woman's thought, and have no need of her affection."

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Septimius said something soft and sweet, and in a measure true, in regard to the necessity he felt for the affection and sympathy of one woman at least—the one now by his side—to keep his life warm and to make the empty chambers of his heart comfortable. But even while he spoke, there was something that dragged upon his tongue; for he felt that the solitary pursuit in which he was engaged carried him apart from the sympathy of which he spoke, and that he was concentrating his efforts and interest entirely upon himself, and that the more he succeeded the more remotely he should be carried away, and that his final triumph would be the complete seclusion of himself from all that breathed,—the converting him, from an interested actor into a cold and disconnected spectator of all mankind's warm and sympathetic life. So, as it turned out, this interview with Rose was one of those in which, coming no one knows from whence, a nameless cloud springs up between two lovers, and keeps them apart from one another by a cold, sullen spell. Usually, however, it requires only one word, spoken out of the heart, to break that spell, and compel the invisible, unsympathetic medium which the enemy of love has stretched cunningly between them to vanish, and let them come closer together than ever; but, in this case, it might be that the love was the illusive state, and the estrangement the real

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

truth, the disenchanted verity. At all events, when the feeling passed away, in Rose's heart there was no reaction, no warmer love, as is generally the case. As for Septimius, he had other things to think about, and when he next met Rose Garfield had forgotten that he had been sensible of a little wounded feeling, on her part, at parting.

By dint of continued poring over the manuscript, Septimius now began to comprehend that it was written in a singular mixture of Latin and ancient English, with constantly recurring paragraphs of what he was convinced was a mystic writing; and these recurring passages of complete unintelligibility seemed to be necessary to the proper understanding of any part of the document. What was discoverable was quaint, curious, but thwarting and perplexing, because it seemed to imply some very great purpose, only to be brought out by what was hidden.

Septimius had read, in the old college library, during his pupilage, a work on ciphers and cryptic writing, but being drawn to it only by his curiosity respecting whatever was hidden, and not expecting ever to use his knowledge, he had obtained only the barest idea of what was necessary to the deciphering a secret passage. Judging by what he could pick out, he would have thought the whole essay was upon the moral conduct; all parts of that he could make

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

out seeming to refer to a certain ascetic rule of life, to denial of pleasures ; these topics being repeated and insisted on everywhere, although without any discoverable reference to religious or moral motives ; and always when the author seemed verging towards a definite purpose, he took refuge in his cipher. Yet withal, imperfectly (or not at all, rather) as Septimius could comprehend its purport, this strange writing had a mystic influence, that wrought upon his imagination, and with the late singular incidents of his life, his continual thought on this one subject, his walk on the hilltop, lonely, or only interrupted by the pale shadow of a girl, combined to set him outside of the living world. Rose Garfield perceived it, knew and felt that he was gliding away from her, and met him with a reserve which she could not overcome.

It was a pity that his early friend, Robert Hagburn, could not at present have any influence over him, having now regularly joined the Continental Army, and being engaged in the expedition of Arnold against Quebec. Indeed, this war, in which the country was so earnestly and enthusiastically engaged, had perhaps an influence on Septimius's state of mind, for it put everybody into an exaggerated and unnatural state, united enthusiasms of all sorts, heightened everybody either into its own heroism or into the peculiar madness to which each person was

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

inclined ; and Septimius walked so much the more wildly on his lonely course, because the people were going enthusiastically on another. In times of revolution and public disturbance all absurdities are more unrestrained ; the measure of calm sense, the habits, the orderly decency, are partially lost. More people become insane, I should suppose ; offences against public morality, female license, are more numerous ; suicides, murders, all ungovernable outbreaks of men's thoughts, embodying themselves in wild acts, take place more frequently, and with less horror to the lookers-on. So [with] Septimius ; there was not, as there would have been at an ordinary time, the same calmness and truth in the public observation, scrutinizing everything with its keen criticism, in that time of seething opinions and overturned principles ; a new time was coming, and Septimius's phase of novelty attracted less attention so far as it was known.

So he continued to brood over the manuscript in his study, and to hide it under lock and key in a recess of the wall, as if it were a secret of murder ; to walk, too, on his hilltop, where at sunset always came the pale, crazy maiden, who still seemed to watch the little hillock with a pertinacious care that was strange to Septimius. By and by came the winter and the deep snows ; and even then, unwilling to give up his habitual

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

place of exercise, the monotonousness of which promoted his wish to keep before his mind one subject of thought, Septimius wore a path through the snow, and still walked there. Here, however, he lost for a time the companionship of the girl ; for when the first snow came, she shivered, and looked at its white heap over the hillock, and said to Septimius, " I will look for it again in the spring."

[Septimius is at the point of despair for want of a guide in his studies.]

The winter swept over, and spring was just beginning to spread its green flush over the more favored exposures of the landscape, although on the north side of stone walls, and the northern nooks of hills, there were still the remnants of snowdrifts. Septimius's hilltop, which was of a soil which quickly rid itself of moisture, now began to be a genial place of resort to him, and he was one morning taking his walk there, meditating upon the still insurmountable difficulties which interposed themselves against the interpretation of the manuscript, yet feeling the new gush of spring bring hope to him, and the energy and elasticity for new effort. Thus pacing to and fro, he was surprised, as he turned at the extremity of his walk, to see a figure advancing towards him ; not that of the pale maiden whom he was accustomed to see there, but a figure as widely different as pos-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

sible. [*He sees a spider dangling from his web, and examines him minutely.*] It was that of a short, broad, somewhat elderly man, dressed in a surtout that had a half-military air; the cocked hat of the period, well worn, and having a fresher spot in it, whence, perhaps, a cockade had been recently taken off; and this personage carried a well-blackened German pipe in his hand, which, as he walked, he applied to his lips, and puffed out volumes of smoke, filling the pleasant western breeze with the fragrance of some excellent Virginia. He came slowly along, and Septimius, slackening his pace a little, came as slowly to meet him, feeling somewhat indignant, to be sure, that anybody should intrude on his sacred hill; until at last they met, as it happened, close by the memorable little hillock, on which the grass and flower leaves also had begun to sprout. The stranger looked keenly at Septimius, made a careless salute by putting his hand up, and took the pipe from his mouth.

"Mr. Septimius Felton, I suppose?" said he.

"That is my name," replied Septimius.

"I am Doctor Jabez Portsoaken," said the stranger, "late surgeon of his Majesty's sixteenth regiment, which I quitted when his Majesty's army quitted Boston, being desirous of trying my fortunes in your country, and giving the people the benefit of my scientific know-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ledge ; also to practise some new modes of medical science, which I could not so well do in the army."

"I think you are quite right, Doctor Jabez Portsoaken," said Septimius, a little confused and bewildered, so unused had he become to the society of strangers.

"And as to you, sir," said the doctor, who had a very rough, abrupt way of speaking, "I have to thank you for a favor done me."

"Have you, sir?" said Septimius, who was quite sure that he had never seen the doctor's uncouth figure before.

"O, ay, me," said the doctor, puffing coolly, — "me, in the person of my niece, a sickly, poor, nervous little thing, who is very fond of walking on your hilltop, and whom you do not send away."

"You are the uncle of Sibyl Dacy?" said Septimius.

"Even so, her mother's brother," said the doctor, with a grotesque bow. "So, being on a visit, the first that the siege allowed me to pay, to see how the girl was getting on, I take the opportunity to pay my respects to you; the more that I understand you to be a young man of some learning, and it is not often that one meets with such in this country."

"No," said Septimius abruptly, for indeed he had half a suspicion that this queer Doctor

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Portsoaken was not altogether sincere, — that, in short, he was making game of him. “You have been misinformed. I know nothing whatever that is worth knowing.”

“Oho!” said the doctor, with a long puff of smoke out of his pipe. “If you are convinced of that, you are one of the wisest men I have met with, young as you are. I must have been twice your age before I got so far; and even now, I am sometimes fool enough to doubt the only thing I was ever sure of knowing. But come, you make me only the more earnest to colloque with you. If we put both our shortcomings together, they may make up an item of positive knowledge.”

“What use can one make of abortive thoughts?” said Septimius.

“Do your speculations take a scientific turn?” said Doctor Portsoaken. “There I can meet you with as much false knowledge and empiricism as you can bring for the life of you. Have you ever tried to study spiders? — there is my strong point now! I have hung my whole interest in life on a spider’s web.”

“I know nothing of them, sir,” said Septimius, “except to crush them when I see them running across the floor, or to brush away the festoons of their webs when they have chanced to escape my Aunt Keziah’s broom.”

“Crush them! Brush away their webs!”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

cried the doctor, apparently in a rage, and shaking his pipe at Septimius. "Sir, it is sacrilege! Yes, it is worse than murder. Every thread of a spider's web is worth more than a thread of gold; and before twenty years are passed, a housemaid will be beaten to death with her own broomstick if she disturbs one of these sacred animals. But, come again. Shall we talk of botany, the virtues of herbs?"

"My Aunt Keziah should meet you there, doctor," said Septimius. "She has a native and original acquaintance with their virtues, and can save and kill with any of the faculty. As for myself, my studies have not turned that way."

"They ought! they ought!" said the doctor, looking meaningly at him. "The whole thing lies in the blossom of an herb. Now, you ought to begin with what lies about you; on this little hillock, for instance;" and looking at the grave beside which they were standing, he gave it a kick which went to Septimius's heart, there seemed to be such a spite and scorn in it. "On this hillock I see some specimens of plants which would be worth your looking at."

Bending down towards the grave as he spoke, he seemed to give closer attention to what he saw there; keeping in his stooping position till his face began to get a purple aspect, for the erudite doctor was of that make of man who has to be kept right side uppermost with care. At

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

length he raised himself, muttering, "Very curious! very curious!"

"Do you see anything remarkable there?" asked Septimius, with some interest.

"Yes," said the doctor bluntly. "No matter what! The time will come when you may like to know it."

"Will you come with me to my residence at the foot of the hill, Doctor Portsoaken?" asked Septimius. "I am not a learned man, and have little or no title to converse with one, except a sincere desire to be wiser than I am. If you can be moved on such terms to give me your companionship, I shall be thankful."

"Sir, I am with you," said Doctor Portsoaken. "I will tell you what I know, in the sure belief (for I will be frank with you) that it will add to the amount of dangerous folly now in your mind, and help you on the way to ruin. Take your choice, therefore, whether to know me further or not."

"I neither shrink nor fear, — neither hope much," said Septimius quietly. "Anything that you can communicate — if anything you can — I shall fearlessly receive, and return you such thanks as it may be found to deserve."

So saying, he led the way down the hill, by the steep path that descended abruptly upon the rear of his bare and unadorned little dwelling; the doctor following with much foul language (for

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

he had a terrible habit of swearing) at the difficulties of the way, to which his short legs were ill adapted. Aunt Keziah met them at the door, and looked sharply at the doctor, who returned the gaze with at least as much keenness, muttering between his teeth as he did so; and to say the truth, Aunt Keziah was as worthy of being sworn at as any woman could well be, for whatever she might have been in her younger days, she was at this time as strange a mixture of an Indian squaw and herb doctress, with the crabbed old maid, and a mingling of the witch aspect running through all, as could well be imagined; and she had a handkerchief over her head, and she was of hue a dusky yellow, and she looked very cross. As Septimius ushered the doctor into his study, and was about to follow him, Aunt Keziah drew him back.

"Septimius, who is this you have brought here?" asked she.

"A man I have met on the hill," answered her nephew; "a Doctor Portsoaken he calls himself, from the old country. He says he has knowledge of herbs and other mysteries; in your own line, it may be. If you want to talk with him, give the man his dinner, and find out what there is in him."

"And what do you want of him yourself, Septimius?" asked she.

"I? Nothing!—that is to say, I expect

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

nothing," said Septimius. "But I am astray, seeking everywhere, and so I reject no hint, no promise, no faintest possibility of aid that I may find anywhere. I judge this man to be a quack, but I judge the same of the most learned man of his profession, or any other; and there is a roughness about this man that may indicate a little more knowledge than if he were smoother. So, as he threw himself in my way, I take him in."

"A grim, ugly-looking old wretch as ever I saw," muttered Aunt Keziah. "Well, he shall have his dinner; and if he likes to talk about yarb-dishes, I'm with him."

So Septimius followed the doctor into his study, where he found him with the sword in his hand, which he had taken from over the mantelpiece, and was holding it drawn, examining the hilt and blade with great minuteness; the hilt being wrought in openwork, with certain heraldic devices, doubtless belonging to the family of its former wearer.

"I have seen this weapon before," said the doctor.

"It may well be," said Septimius. "It was once worn by a person who served in the army of your king."

"And you took it from him?" said the doctor.

"If I did, it was in no way that I need be

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ashamed of, or afraid to tell, though I choose rather not to speak of it," answered Septimius.

"Have you, then, no desire nor interest to know the family, the personal history, the prospects, of him who once wore this sword, and who will never draw sword again?" inquired Doctor Portsoaken. "Poor Cyril Norton! There was a singular story attached to that young man, sir, and a singular mystery he carried about with him, the end of which, perhaps, is not yet."

Septimius would have been, indeed, well enough pleased to learn the mystery which he himself had seen that there was about the man whom he slew; but he was afraid that some question might be thereby started about the secret document that he had kept possession of; and he therefore would have wished to avoid the whole subject.

"I cannot be supposed to take much interest in English family history. It is a hundred and fifty years, at least, since my own family ceased to be English," he answered. "I care more for the present and future than for the past."

"It is all one," said the doctor, sitting down, taking out a pinch of tobacco and refilling his pipe.

It is unnecessary to follow up the description of the visit of the eccentric doctor through the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

day. Suffice it to say that there was a sort of charm, or rather fascination, about the uncouth old fellow, in spite of his strange ways ; in spite of his constant puffing of tobacco ; and in spite, too, of a constant imbibing of strong liquor, which he made inquiries for, and of which the best that could be produced was a certain decoction, infusion, or distillation, pertaining to Aunt Keziah, and of which the basis was rum, be it said, done up with certain bitter herbs of the old lady's own gathering, at proper times of the moon, and which was a well-known drink to all who were favored with Aunt Keziah's friendship ; though there was a story that it was the very drink which used to be passed round at witch meetings, being brewed from the Devil's own recipe. And, in truth, judging from the taste (for I once took a sip of a draught prepared from the same ingredients and in the same way), I should think this hellish origin might be the veritable one.

[*"I thought," quoth the doctor, "I could drink anything, but" —*]

But the valiant doctor sipped, and sipped again, and said with great blasphemy that it was the real stuff, and only needed henbane to make it perfect. Then, taking from his pocket a good-sized leathern-covered flask, with a silver lip fastened on the muzzle, he offered it to Septimius, who declined, and to Aunt Keziah,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

who preferred her own decoction, and then drank it off himself, with a loud smack of satisfaction, declaring it to be infernally good brandy.

Well, after this Septimius and he talked ; and I know not how it was, but there was a great deal of imagination in this queer man, whether a bodily or spiritual influence it might be hard to say. On the other hand, Septimius had for a long while held little intercourse with men, none whatever with men who could comprehend him ; the doctor, too, seemed to bring the discourse singularly in apposition with what his host was continually thinking about, for he conversed on occult matters, on people who had had the art of living long, and had only died at last by accident, on the powers and qualities of common herbs, which he believed to be so great, that all around our feet — growing in the wild forest, afar from man, or following the footsteps of man wherever he fixes his residence, across seas, from the old homesteads whence he migrated, following him everywhere, and offering themselves sedulously and continually to his notice, while he only plucks them away from the comparatively worthless things which he cultivates, and flings them aside, blaspheming at them because Providence has sown them so thickly — grow what we call weeds, only because all the generations, from the be-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ginning of time till now, have failed to discover their wondrous virtues, potent for the curing of all diseases, potent for procuring length of days.

"Everything good," said the doctor, drinking another dram of brandy, "lies right at our feet, and all we need is to gather it up."

"That's true," quoth Keziah, taking just a little sup of her hellish preparation; "these herbs were all gathered within a hundred yards of this very spot, though it took a wise woman to find out their virtues."

The old woman went off about her household duties, and then it was that Septimius submitted to the doctor the list of herbs which he had picked out of the old document, asking him, as something apposite to the subject of their discourse, whether he was acquainted with them, for most of them had very queer names, some in Latin, some in English.

The bluff doctor put on his spectacles, and looked over the slip of yellow and worn paper scrutinizingly, puffing tobacco smoke upon it in great volumes, as if thereby to make its hidden purport come out; he mumbled to himself, he took another sip from his flask; and then, putting it down on the table, appeared to meditate.

"This infernal old document," said he, at length, "is one that I have never seen before, yet heard of, nevertheless; for it was my folly

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

in youth (and whether I am any wiser now is more than I take upon me to say, but it was my folly then) to be in quest of certain kinds of secret knowledge, which the fathers of science thought attainable. Now, in several quarters, amongst people with whom my pursuits brought me in contact, I heard of a certain recipe which had been lost for a generation or two, but which, if it could be recovered, would prove to have the true life-giving potency in it. It is said that the ancestor of a great old family in England was in possession of this secret, being a man of science, and the friend of Friar Bacon, who was said to have concocted it himself, partly from the precepts of his master, partly from his own experiments, and it is thought he might have been living to this day, if he had not unluckily been killed in the Wars of the Roses ; for you know no recipe for long life would be proof against an old English arrow, or a leaden bullet from one of our own firelocks."

" And what has been the history of the thing after his death ? " asked Septimius.

" It was supposed to be preserved in the family," said the doctor, " and it has always been said, that the head and eldest son of that family had it at his option to live forever, if he could only make up his mind to it. But seemingly there were difficulties in the way. There was probably a certain diet and regimen to be ob-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

served, certain strict rules of life to be kept, a certain asceticism to be imposed on the person, which was not quite agreeable to young men ; and after the period of youth was passed, the human frame became incapable of being regenerated from the seeds of decay and death, which, by that time, had become strongly developed in it. In short, while young, the possessor of the secret found the terms of immortal life too hard to be accepted, since it implied the giving up of most of the things that made life desirable in his view ; and when he came to a more reasonable mind, it was too late. And so, in all the generations since Friar Bacon's time, the Nortons have been born, and enjoyed their young days, and worried through their manhood, and tottered through their old age (unless taken off sooner by sword, arrow, ball, fever, or what not), and died in their beds, like men that had no such option ; and so this old yellow paper has done not the least good to any mortal. Neither do I see how it can do any good to you, since you know not the rules, moral or dietetic, that are essential to its effect. But how did you come by it ? ”

“ It matters not how,” said Septimius gloomily. “ Enough that I am its rightful possessor and inheritor. Can you read these old characters ? ”

“ Most of them,” said the doctor ; “ but let

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

me tell you, my young friend, I have no faith whatever in this secret ; and, having meddled with such things myself, I ought to know. The old physicians and chemists had strange ideas of the virtues of plants, drugs, and minerals, and equally strange fancies as to the way of getting those virtues into action. They would throw a hundred different potencies into a caldron together, and put them on the fire, and expect to brew a potency containing all their potencies, and having a different virtue of its own. Whereas, the most likely result would be that they would counteract one another, and the concoction be of no virtue at all ; or else some more powerful ingredient would tincture the whole."

He read the paper again, and continued : —

" I see nothing else so remarkable in this recipe, as that it is chiefly made up of some of the commonest things that grow ; plants that you set your foot upon at your very threshold, in your garden, in your wood walks, wherever you go. I doubt not old Aunt Keziah knows them, and very likely she has brewed them up in that hell drink, the remembrance of which is still rankling in my stomach. I thought I had swallowed the Devil himself, whom the old woman had been boiling down. It would be curious enough if the hideous decoction was the same as old Friar Bacon and his acolyte discovered

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

by their science ! One ingredient, however, one of those plants, I scarcely think the old lady can have put into her pot of Devil's elixir ; for it is a rare plant, that does not grow in these parts."

" And what is that ? " asked Septimius.

" *Sanguinea sanguinissima*," said the doctor ; " it has no vulgar name ; but it produces a very beautiful flower, which I have never seen, though some seeds of it were sent me by a learned friend in Siberia. The others, divested of their Latin names, are as common as plantain, pigweed, and burdock ; and it stands to reason that, if vegetable Nature has any such wonderfully efficacious medicine in store for men, and means them to use it, she would have strewn it everywhere plentifully within their reach."

" But, after all, it would be a mockery on the old dame's part," said the young man, somewhat bitterly, " since she would thus hold the desired thing seemingly within our reach ; but because she never tells us how to prepare and obtain its efficacy, we miss it just as much as if all the ingredients were hidden from sight and knowledge in the centre of the earth. We are the playthings and fools of Nature, which she amuses herself with during our little lifetime, and then breaks for mere sport, and laughs in our faces as she does so."

" Take care, my good fellow," said the doctor, with his great coarse laugh. " I rather sus-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

me tell you, my young friend, I have no faith whatever in this secret ; and, having meddled with such things myself, I ought to know. The old physicians and chemists had strange ideas of the virtues of plants, drugs, and minerals, and equally strange fancies as to the way of getting those virtues into action. They would throw a hundred different potencies into a caldron together, and put them on the fire, and expect to brew a potency containing all their potencies, and having a different virtue of its own. Whereas, the most likely result would be that they would counteract one another, and the concoction be of no virtue at all ; or else some more powerful ingredient would tincture the whole."

He read the paper again, and continued : —

" I see nothing else so remarkable in this recipe, as that it is chiefly made up of some of the commonest things that grow ; plants that you set your foot upon at your very threshold, in your garden, in your wood walks, wherever you go. I doubt not old Aunt Keziah knows them, and very likely she has brewed them up in that hell drink, the remembrance of which is still rankling in my stomach. I thought I had swallowed the Devil himself, whom the old woman had been boiling down. It would be curious enough if the hideous decoction was the same as old Friar Bacon and his acolyte discovered

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

by their science ! One ingredient, however, one of those plants, I scarcely think the old lady can have put into her pot of Devil's elixir ; for it is a rare plant, that does not grow in these parts."

" And what is that ? " asked Septimius.

" *Sanguinea sanguinissima*," said the doctor ; " it has no vulgar name ; but it produces a very beautiful flower, which I have never seen, though some seeds of it were sent me by a learned friend in Siberia. The others, divested of their Latin names, are as common as plantain, pigweed, and burdock ; and it stands to reason that, if vegetable Nature has any such wonderfully efficacious medicine in store for men, and means them to use it, she would have strewn it everywhere plentifully within their reach."

" But, after all, it would be a mockery on the old dame's part," said the young man, somewhat bitterly, " since she would thus hold the desired thing seemingly within our reach ; but because she never tells us how to prepare and obtain its efficacy, we miss it just as much as if all the ingredients were hidden from sight and knowledge in the centre of the earth. We are the playthings and fools of Nature, which she amuses herself with during our little lifetime, and then breaks for mere sport, and laughs in our faces as she does so."

" Take care, my good fellow," said the doctor, with his great coarse laugh. " I rather sus-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

pect that you have already got beyond the age when the great medicine could do you good ; that speech indicates a great toughness and hardness and bitterness about the heart that does not accumulate in our tender years.”

Septimius took little or no notice of the raillery of the grim old doctor, but employed the rest of the time in getting as much information as he could out of his guest ; and though he could not bring himself to show him the precious and sacred manuscript, yet he questioned him as closely as possible without betraying his secret, as to the modes of finding out cryptic writings. The doctor was not without the perception that his dark-browed, keen-eyed acquaintance had some purpose not openly avowed in all these pertinacious, distinct questions ; he discovered a central reference in them all, and perhaps knew that Septimius must have in his possession some writing in hieroglyphics, cipher, or other secret mode, that conveyed instructions how to operate with the strange recipe that he had shown him.

“ You had better trust me fully, my good sir,” said he. “ Not but what I will give you all the aid I can without it ; for you have done me a greater benefit than you are aware of, beforehand. No — you will not ? Well, if you can change your mind, seek me out in Boston, where I have seen fit to settle in the practice of my

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

profession, and I will serve you according to your folly ; for folly it is, I warn you."

Nothing else worthy of record is known to have passed during the doctor's visit ; and in due time he disappeared, as it were, in a whiff of tobacco smoke, leaving an odor of brandy and tobacco behind him, and a traditionary memory of a wizard that had been there. Septimius went to work with what items of knowledge he had gathered from him ; but the interview had at least made him aware of one thing, which was, that he must provide himself with all possible quantity of scientific knowledge of botany, and perhaps more extensive knowledge, in order to be able to concoct the recipe. It was the fruit of all the scientific attainment of the age that produced it (so said the legend, which seemed reasonable enough), a great philosopher had wrought his learning into it ; and this had been, attempered, regulated, improved, by the quick, bright intellect of his scholar. Perhaps, thought Septimius, another deep and earnest intelligence added to these two may bring the precious recipe to still greater perfection. At least it shall be tried. So thinking, he gathered together all the books that he could find relating to such studies ; he spent one day, moreover, in a walk to Cambridge, where he searched the alcoves of the college library for such works as it contained ; and borrowing them from the war-dis-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

turbed institution of learning, he betook himself homewards, and applied himself to the study with an earnestness of zealous application that perhaps has been seldom equalled in a study of so quiet a character. A month or two of study, with practice upon such plants as he found upon his hilltop, and along the brook and in other neighboring localities, sufficed to do a great deal for him. In this pursuit he was assisted by Sibyl, who proved to have great knowledge in some botanical departments, especially among flowers ; and in her cold and quiet way, she met him on this subject and glided by his side, as she had done so long, a companion, a daily observer and observed of him, mixing herself up with his pursuits, as if she were an attendant sprite upon him.

But this pale girl was not the only associate of his studies, the only instructress, whom Septimius found. The observation which Doctor Portsoaken made about the fantastic possibility that Aunt Keziah might have inherited the same recipe from her Indian ancestry which had been struck out by the science of Friar Bacon and his pupil had not failed to impress Septimius, and to remain on his memory. So, not long after the doctor's departure, the young man took occasion one evening to say to his aunt that he thought his stomach was a little out of order with too much application, and that perhaps

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

she could give him some herb drink or other that would be good for him.

“That I can, Seppy, my darling,” said the old woman, “and I’m glad you have the sense to ask for it at last. Here it is in this bottle; and though that foolish, blaspheming doctor turned up his old brandy nose at it, I’ll drink with him any day and come off better than he.”

So saying, she took out of the closet her brown jug, stopped with a cork that had a rag twisted round it to make it tighter, filled a mug half full of the concoction, and set it on the table before Septimius.

“There, child, smell of that; the smell merely will do you good; but drink it down, and you’ll live the longer for it.”

“Indeed, Aunt Keziah, is that so?” asked Septimius, a little startled by a recommendation which in some measure tallied with what he wanted in a medicine. “That’s a good quality.”

He looked into the mug, and saw a turbid, yellow concoction, not at all attractive to the eye; he smelt of it, and was partly of opinion that Aunt Keziah had mixed a certain unfra-grant vegetable, called skunk cabbage, with the other ingredients of her witch drink. He tasted it; not a mere sip, but a good, genuine gulp, being determined to have real proof of what the stuff was in all respects. The draught seemed at first to burn in his mouth, unaccustomed to

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

any drink but water, and to go scorching all the way down into his stomach, making him sensible of the depth of his inwards by a track of fire, far, far, far down ; and then, worse than the fire, came a taste of hideous bitterness and nauseousness, which he had not previously conceived to exist, and which threatened to stir up his bowels into utter revolt ; but knowing Aunt Keziah's touchiness with regard to this concoction, and how sacred she held it, he made an effort of real heroism, squelched down his agony, and kept his face quiet, with the exception of one strong convulsion, which he allowed to twist across it for the sake of saving his life.

"It tastes as if it might have great potency in it, Aunt Keziah," said this unfortunate young man ; "I wish you would tell me what it is made of, and how you brew it ; for I have observed you are very strict and secret about it."

"Aha ! you have seen that, have you ?" said Aunt Keziah, taking a sip of her beloved liquid, and grinning at him with a face and eyes as yellow as that she was drinking. In fact, the idea struck him, that in temper, and all appreciable qualities, Aunt Keziah was a good deal like this drink of hers, having probably become saturated by them while she drank of it. And then, having drunk, she gloated over it, and tasted, and smelt of the cup of this hellish wine, as a winebibber does of that which is most fragrant and delicate.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“And you want to know how I make it? But first, child, tell me honestly, do you love this drink of mine? Otherwise, here, and at once, we stop talking about it.”

“I love it for its virtues,” said Septimius, temporizing with his conscience, “and would prefer it on that account to the rarest wines.”

“So far good,” said Aunt Keziah, who could not well conceive that her liquor should be otherwise than delicious to the palate. “It is the most virtuous liquor that ever was; and therefore one need not fear drinking too much of it. And you want to know what it is made of? Well, I have often thought of telling you, Seppy, my boy, when you should come to be old enough; for I have no other inheritance to leave you, and you are all of my blood, unless I should happen to have some far-off uncle among the Cape Indians. But first, you must know how this good drink, and the faculty of making it, came down to me from the chiefs, and sachems, and Peow-wows, that were your ancestors and mine, Septimius, and from the old wizard who was my great-grandfather and yours, and who, they say, added the fire water to the other ingredients, and so gave it the only one thing that it wanted to make it perfect.”

And so Aunt Keziah, who had now put herself into a most comfortable and jolly state by sipping again, and after pressing Septimius to

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

mind his draught (who declined, on the plea that one dram at a time was enough for a new beginner, its virtues being so strong as well as admirable), the old woman told him a legend strangely wild and uncouth, and mixed up of savage and civilized life, and of the superstitions of both, but which yet had a certain analogy, that impressed Septimius much, to the story that the doctor had told him.

She said that, many ages ago, there had been a wild sachem in the forest, a king among the Indians, and from whom, the old lady said, with a look of pride, she and Septimius were lineally descended, and were probably the very last who inherited one drop of that royal, wise, and warlike blood. The sachem had lived very long, longer than anybody knew, for the Indians kept no record, and could only talk of a great number of moons ; and they said he was as old, or older, than the oldest trees ; as old as the hills almost, and could remember back to the days of godlike men, who had arts then forgotten. He was a wise and good man, and could foretell as far into the future as he could remember into the past ; and he continued to live on, till his people were afraid that he would live forever, and so disturb the whole order of nature ; and they thought it time that so good a man, and so great a warrior and wizard, should be gone to the happy hunting grounds, and that so wise a

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

counsellor should go and tell his experience of life to the Great Father, and give him an account of matters here, and perhaps lead him to make some changes in the conduct of the lower world. And so, all these things duly considered, they very reverently assassinated the great, never dying sachem ; for though safe against disease, and undecayable by age, he was capable of being killed by violence, though the hardness of his skull broke to fragments the stone tomahawk with which they at first tried to kill him.

So a deputation of the best and bravest of the tribe went to the great sachem, and told him their thought, and reverently desired his consent to be put out of the world. and the undying one agreed with them that it was better for his own comfort that he should die, and that he had long been weary of the world, having learned all that it could teach him, and having, chiefly, learned to despair of ever making the red race much better than they now were. So he cheerfully consented, and told them to kill him if they could : and first they tried the stone hatchet, which was broken against his skull ; and then they shot arrows at him, which could not pierce the toughness of his skin ; and finally they plastered up his nose and mouth (which kept uttering wisdom to the last) with clay, and set him to bake in the sun ; so at last his life burnt out

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

of his breast, tearing his body to pieces, and he died.

[Make this legend grotesque, and express the weariness of the tribe at the intolerable control the undying one had of them ; his always bringing up precepts from his own experience, never consenting to anything new, and so impeding progress ; his habits hardening into him, his ascribing to himself all wisdom, and depriving everybody of his right to successive command ; his endless talk, and dwelling on the past, so that the world could not bear him. Describe his ascetic and severe habits, his rigid calmness, etc.]

But before the great sagamore died he imparted to a chosen one of his tribe, the next wisest to himself, the secret of a potent and delicious drink, the constant imbibing of which, together with his abstinence from luxury and passion, had kept him alive so long, and would doubtless have compelled him to live forever. This drink was compounded of many ingredients, all of which were remembered and handed down in tradition, save one, which, either because it was nowhere to be found, or for some other reason, was forgotten ; so that the drink ceased to give immortal life as before. They say it was a beautiful purple flower. *[Perhaps the Devil taught him the drink, or else the Great Spirit, — doubtful which.]* But it still was a most excellent drink, and conducive to health,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and the cure of all diseases ; and the Indians had it at the time of the settlement by the English ; and at one of those wizard meetings in the forest, where the Black Man used to meet his red children and his white ones, and be jolly with them, a great Indian wizard taught the secret to Septimius's great-grandfather, who was a wizard, and died for it ; and he, in return, taught the Indians to mix it with rum, thinking that this might be the very ingredient that was missing, and that by adding it he might give endless life to himself and all his Indian friends, among whom he had taken a wife.

“ But your great-grandfather, you know, had not a fair chance to test its virtues, having been hanged for a wizard ; and as for the Indians, they probably mixed too much fire water with their liquid, so that it burnt them up, and they all died ; and my mother, and her mother, — who taught the drink to me, — and her mother afore her, thought it a sin to try to live longer than the Lord pleased, so they let themselves die. And though the drink is good, Septimius, and toothsome, as you see, yet I sometimes feel as if I were getting old, like other people, and may die in the course of the next half-century ; so perhaps the rum was not just the thing that was wanting to make up the recipe. But it is very good ! Take a drop more of it, dear.”

“ Not at present, I thank you, Aunt Keziah,”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

said Septimius gravely ; “ but will you tell me what the ingredients are, and how you make it ? ”

“ Yes, I will, my boy, and you shall write them down,” said the old woman ; “ for it’s a good drink, and none the worse, it may be, for not making you live forever. I sometimes think I had as lief go to heaven as keep on living here.”

Accordingly, making Septimius take pen and ink, she proceeded to tell him a list of plants and herbs and forest productions, and he was surprised to find that it agreed most wonderfully with the recipe contained in the old manuscript, as he had puzzled it out, and as it had been explained by the doctor. There were a few variations, it is true ; but even here there was a close analogy, plants indigenous to America being substituted for cognate productions, the growth of Europe. Then there was another difference in the mode of preparation, Aunt Keziah’s nostrum being a concoction, whereas the old manuscript gave a process of distillation. This similarity had a strong effect on Septimius’s imagination. Here was, in one case, a drink suggested, as might be supposed, to a primitive people by something similar to that instinct by which the brute creation recognizes the medicaments suited to its needs, so that they mixed up fragrant herbs for reasons wiser

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

than they knew, and made them into a salutary potion ; and here, again, was a drink contrived by the utmost skill of a great civilized philosopher, searching the whole field of science for his purpose : and these two drinks proved, in all essential particulars, to be identically the same.

“ O Aunt Keziah,” said he, with a longing earnestness, “ are you sure that you cannot remember that one ingredient ? ”

“ No, Septimius, I cannot possibly do it,” said she. “ I have tried many things, skunk cabbage, wormwood, and a thousand things ; for it is truly a pity that the chief benefit of the thing should be lost for so little. But the only effect was, to spoil the good taste of the stuff, and, two or three times, to poison myself, so that I broke out all over blotches, and once lost the use of my left arm, and got a dizziness in the head, and a rheumatic twist in my knee, a hardness of hearing, and a dimness of sight, and the trembles : all of which I certainly believe to have been caused by my putting something else into this blessed drink besides the good New England rum. Stick to that, Seppy, my dear.”

So saying, Aunt Keziah took yet another sip of the beloved liquid, after vainly pressing Septimius to do the like ; and then lighting her old clay pipe, she sat down in the chimney corner, meditating, dreaming, muttering pious prayers

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and ejaculations, and sometimes looking up the wide flue of the chimney, with thoughts, perhaps, how delightful it must have been to fly up there, in old times, on excursions by midnight into the forest, where was the Black Man, and the Puritan deacons and ladies, and those wild Indian ancestors of hers; and where the wildness of the forest was so grim and delightful, and so unlike the commonplaceness in which she spent her life. For thus did the savage strain of the woman, mixed up as it was with the other weird and religious parts of her composition, sometimes snatch her back into barbarian life and its instincts; and in Septimius, though further diluted, and modified likewise by higher cultivation, there was the same tendency.

Septimius escaped from the old woman, and was glad to breathe the free air again, so much had he been wrought upon by her wild legends and wild character, the more powerful by its analogy with his own; and perhaps, too, his brain had been a little bewildered by the draught of her diabolical concoction which she had compelled him to take. At any rate, he was glad to escape to his hilltop, the free air of which had doubtless contributed to keep him in health through so long a course of morbid thought and estranged study as he had addicted himself to.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

. Here, as it happened, he found both Rose Garfield and Sibyl Dacy, whom the pleasant summer evening had brought out. They had formed a friendship, or at least society; and there could not well be a pair more unlike, — the one so natural, so healthy, so fit to live in the world; the other such a morbid, pale thing. So there they were, walking arm in arm, with one arm round each other's waist, as girls love to do. They greeted the young man in their several ways, and began to walk to and fro together, looking at the sunset as it came on, and talking of things on earth and in the clouds.

"When has Robert Hagburn been heard from?" asked Septimius, who, involved in his own pursuits, was altogether behindhand in the matters of the war, — shame to him for it!

"There came news, two days past," said Rose, blushing. "He is on his way home with the remnant of General Arnold's command, and will be here soon."

"He is a brave fellow, Robert," said Septimius carelessly. "And I know not, since life is so short, that anything better can be done with it than to risk it as he does."

"I truly think not," said Rose Garfield composedly.

"What a blessing it is to mortals," said Sibyl Dacy, "what a kindness of Providence, that life is made so uncertain; that death is thrown in

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

among the possibilities of our being ; that these awful mysteries are thrown around us, into which we may vanish ! For, without it, how would it be possible to be heroic, how should we plod along in commonplaces forever, never dreaming high things, never risking anything ? For my part, I think man is more favored than the angels, and made capable of higher heroism, greater virtue, and of a more excellent spirit than they, because we have such a mystery of grief and terror around us ; whereas they, being in a certainty of God's light, seeing his goodness and his purposes more perfectly than we, cannot be so brave as often poor weak man, and weaker woman, has the opportunity to be, and sometimes makes use of it. God gave the whole world to man, and if he is left alone with it, it will make a clod of him at last ; but, to remedy that, God gave man a grave, and it redeems all, while it seems to destroy all, and makes an immortal spirit of him in the end."

"Dear Sibyl, you are inspired," said Rose, gazing in her face.

"I think you ascribe a great deal too much potency to the grave," said Septimius, pausing involuntarily alone by the little hillock, whose contents he knew so well. "The grave seems to me a vile pitfall, put right in our pathway, and catching most of us, — all of us, — causing us to tumble in at the most inconvenient oppor-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tunities, so that all human life is a jest and a farce, just for the sake of this inopportune death; for I observe it never waits for us to accomplish anything: we may have the salvation of a country in hand, but we are none the less likely to die for that. So that, being a believer, on the whole, in the wisdom and graciousness of Providence, I am convinced that dying is a mistake, and that by and by we shall overcome it. I say there is no use in the grave."

"I still adhere to what I said," answered Sibyl Dacy; "and besides, there is another use of a grave which I have often observed in old English graveyards, where the moss grows green, and embosses the letters of the gravestones; and also graves are very good for flower beds."

Nobody ever could tell when the strange girl was going to say what was laughable,—when what was melancholy; and neither of Sibyl's auditors knew quite what to make of this speech. Neither could Septimius fail to be a little startled by seeing her, as she spoke of the grave as a flower bed, stoop down to the little hillock to examine the flowers, which, indeed, seemed to prove her words by growing there in strange abundance, and of many sorts; so that, if they could all have bloomed at once, the spot would have looked like a bouquet by itself, or as if the earth were richest in beauty there, or as if seeds had been lavished by some

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

florist. Septimius could not account for it, for though the hillside did produce certain flowers, — the aster, the golden-rod, the violet, and other such simple and common things, — yet this seemed as if a carpet of bright colors had been thrown down there and covered the spot.

“This is very strange,” said he.

“Yes,” said Sibyl Dacy, “there is some strange richness in this little spot of soil.”

“Where could the seeds have come from? — that is the greatest wonder,” said Rose. “You might almost teach me botany, methinks, on this one spot.”

“Do you know this plant?” asked Sibyl of Septimius, pointing to one not yet in flower, but of singular leaf, that was thrusting itself up out of the ground, on the very centre of the grave, over where the breast of the sleeper below might seem to be. “I think there is no other here like it.”

Septimius stooped down to examine it, and was convinced that it was unlike anything he had seen of the flower kind; a leaf of a dark green, with purple veins traversing it, it had a sort of questionable aspect, as some plants have, so that you would think it very likely to be poison, and would not like to touch or smell very intimately, without first inquiring who would be its guarantee that it should do no mis-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

chief. That it had some richness or other, either baneful or beneficial, you could not doubt.

"I think it poisonous," said Rose Garfield, shuddering, for she was a person so natural she hated poisonous things, or anything speckled especially, and did not, indeed, love strangeness. "Yet I should not wonder if it bore a beautiful flower by and by. Nevertheless, if I were to do just as I feel inclined, I should root it up and fling it away."

"Shall she do so?" said Sibyl to Septimius.

"Not for the world," said he hastily. "Above all things, I desire to see what will come of this plant."

"Be it as you please," said Sibyl. "Meanwhile, if you like to sit down here and listen to me, I will tell you a story that happens to come into my mind just now, — I cannot tell why. It is a legend of an old hall that I know well, and have known from my childhood, in one of the northern counties of England, where I was born. Would you like to hear it, Rose?"

"Yes, of all things," said she. "I like all stories of hall and cottage in the old country, though now we must not call it our country any more."

Sibyl looked at Septimius, as if to inquire whether he, too, chose to listen to her story, and he made answer: —

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“Yes, I shall like to hear the legend, if it is a genuine one that has been adopted into the popular belief, and came down in chimney corners with the smoke and soot that gathers there; and incruited over with humanity, by passing from one homely mind to another. Then, such stories get to be true, in a certain sense, and indeed in that sense may be called true throughout, for the very nucleus, the fiction in them, seems to have come out of the heart of man in a way that cannot be imitated of malice aforethought. Nobody can make a tradition; it takes a century to make it.”

“I know not whether this legend has the character you mean,” said Sibyl, “but it has lived much more than a century; and here it is.

“On the threshold of one of the doors of — Hall there is a bloody footstep impressed into the doorstep, and ruddy as if the bloody foot had just trodden there; and it is averred that, on a certain night of the year, and at a certain hour of the night, if you go and look at that doorstep you will see the mark wet with fresh blood. Some have pretended to say that this appearance of blood was but dew; but can dew redden a cambric handkerchief? Will it crimson the finger tips when you touch it? And that is what the bloody footstep will surely do when the appointed night and hour come

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

round, this very year, just as it would three hundred years ago.

“ Well, but how did it come there ? I know not precisely in what age it was, but long ago, when light was beginning to shine into what were called the dark ages, there was a lord of — Hall who applied himself deeply to knowledge and science, under the guidance of the wisest man of that age, — a man so wise that he was thought to be a wizard ; and, indeed, he may have been one, if to be a wizard consists in having command over secret powers of nature, that other men do not even suspect the existence of, and the control of which enables one to do feats that seem as wonderful as raising the dead. It is needless to tell you all the strange stories that have survived to this day about the old Hall ; and how it is believed that the master of it, owing to his ancient science, has still a sort of residence there, and control of the place ; and how, in one of the chambers, there is still his antique table, and his chair, and some rude old instruments and machinery, and a book, and everything in readiness, just as if he might still come back to finish some experiment. What it is important to say is, that one of the chief things to which the old lord applied himself was to discover the means of prolonging his own life, so that its duration should be indefinite, if not infinite ; and such was his science, that he

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

was believed to have attained this magnificent and awful purpose.

“ So, as you may suppose, the man of science had great joy in having done this thing, both for the pride of it, and because it was so delightful a thing to have before him the prospect of endless time, which he might spend in adding more and more to his science, and so doing good to the world ; for the chief obstruction to the improvement of the world and the growth of knowledge is, that mankind cannot go straight forward in it, but continually there have to be new beginnings, and it takes every new man half his life, if not the whole of it, to come up to the point where his predecessor left off. And so this noble man — this man of a noble purpose — spent many years in finding out this mighty secret ; and at last, it is said, he succeeded. But on what terms ?

“ Well, it is said that the terms were dreadful and horrible ; insomuch that the wise man hesitated whether it were lawful and desirable to take advantage of them, great as was the object in view.

“ You see, the object of the lord of — Hall was to take a life from the course of Nature, and Nature did not choose to be defrauded ; so that, great as was the power of this scientific man over her, she would not consent that he should escape the necessity of dying at his proper time,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

except upon condition of sacrificing some other life for his ; and this was to be done once for every thirty years that he chose to live, thirty years being the account of a generation of man ; and if in any way, in that time, this lord could be the death of a human being, that satisfied the requisition, and he might live on. There is a form of the legend which says, that one of the ingredients of the drink which the nobleman brewed by his science was the heart's blood of a pure young boy or girl. But this I reject, as too coarse an idea ; and, indeed, I think it may be taken to mean symbolically, that the person who desires to engross to himself more than his share of human life must do it by sacrificing to his selfishness some dearest interest of another person, who has a good right to life, and may be as useful in it as he.

“ Now, this lord was a just man by nature, and if he had gone astray, it was greatly by reason of his earnest wish to do something for the poor, wicked, struggling, bloody, uncomfortable race of man, to which he belonged. He bethought himself whether he would have a right to take the life of one of those creatures, without their own consent, in order to prolong his own ; and after much arguing to and fro, he came to the conclusion that he should not have the right, unless it were a life over which he had control, and which was the next to his own. He looked

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

round him ; he was a lonely and abstracted man, secluded by his studies from human affections, and there was but one human being whom he cared for ; — that was a beautiful kinswoman, an orphan, whom his father had brought up, and, dying, left her to his care. There was great kindness and affection — as great as the abstracted nature of his pursuits would allow — on the part of this lord towards the beautiful young girl ; but not what is called love, — at least, he never acknowledged it to himself. But, looking into his heart, he saw that she, if any one, was to be the person whom the sacrifice demanded, and that he might kill twenty others without effect, but if he took the life of this one, it would make the charm strong and good.

“ My friends, I have meditated many a time on this ugly feature of my legend, and am unwilling to take it in the literal sense ; so I conceive its spiritual meaning (for everything, you know, has its spiritual meaning, which to the literal meaning is what the soul is to the body), — its spiritual meaning was, that to the deep pursuit of science we must sacrifice great part of the joy of life ; that nobody can be great, and do great things, without giving up to death, so far as he regards his enjoyment of it, much that he would gladly enjoy : and in that sense I choose to take it. But the earthly old legend will have it that this mad, high-minded, heroic, murderous

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

lord did insist upon it with himself that he must murder this poor, loving, and beloved child.

“I do not wish to delay upon this horrible matter, and to tell you how he argued it with himself; and how, the more and more he argued it, the more reasonable it seemed, the more absolutely necessary, the more a duty, that the terrible sacrifice should be made. Here was this great good to be done to mankind, and all that stood in the way of it was one little delicate life, so frail that it was likely enough to be blown out, any day, by the mere rude blast that the rush of life creates, as it streams along, or by any slightest accident; so good and pure, too, that she was quite unfit for this world, and not capable of any happiness in it; and all that was asked of her was to allow herself to be transported to a place where she would be happy, and would find companions fit for her, — which he, her only present companion, certainly was not. In fine, he resolved to shed the sweet, fragrant blood of this little violet that loved him so.

“Well, let us hurry over this part of the story as fast as we can. He did slay this pure young girl: he took her into the wood near the house, an old wood that is standing yet, with some of its magnificent oaks; and then he plunged a dagger into her heart, after they had had a very tender and loving talk together, in which he had tried to open the matter tenderly to her, and

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

make her understand that, though he was to slay her, it was really for the very reason that he loved her better than anything else in the world, and that he would far rather die himself, if that would answer the purpose at all. Indeed, he is said to have offered her the alternative of slaying him, and taking upon herself the burden of indefinite life, and the studies and pursuits by which he meant to benefit mankind. But she, it is said, — this noble, pure, loving child, — she looked up into his face and smiled sadly, and then snatching the dagger from him, she plunged it into her own heart. I cannot tell whether this be true, or whether she waited to be killed by him; but this I know, that in the same circumstances I think I should have saved my lover or my friend the pain of killing me. There she lay dead, at any rate, and he buried her in the wood, and returned to the house; and, as it happened, he had set his right foot in her blood, and his shoe was wet in it, and by some miraculous fate it left a track all along the wood path, and into the house, and on the stone steps of the threshold, and up into his chamber, all along; and the servants saw it the next day, and wondered, and whispered, and missed the fair young girl, and looked askance at their lord's right foot, and turned pale, all of them, as death.

“And next, the legend says, that Sir Forrester was struck with horror at what he had done,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and could not bear the laboratory where he had toiled so long, and was sick to death of the object that he had pursued, and was most miserable, and fled from his old Hall, and was gone full many a day. But all the while he was gone there was the mark of a bloody footstep impressed upon the stone doorstep of the Hall. The track had lain all along through the wood path, and across the lawn, to the old Gothic door of the Hall; but the rain, the English rain, that is always falling, had come the next day, and washed it all away. The track had lain, too, across the broad hall, and up the stairs, and into the lord's study; but there it had lain on the rushes that were strewn there, and these the servants had gathered carefully up, and thrown them away, and spread fresh ones. So that it was only on the threshold that the mark remained.

“ But the legend says, that wherever Sir Forrester went in his wanderings about the world, he left a bloody track behind him. It was wonderful, and very inconvenient, this phenomenon. When he went into a church, you would see the track up the broad aisle, and a little red puddle in the place where he sat or knelt. Once he went to the king's court, and there being a track up to the very throne, the king frowned upon him, so that he never came there any more. Nobody could tell how it happened; his foot was not seen to bleed, only there was the bloody

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

track behind him, wherever he went ; and he was a horror-stricken man, always looking behind him to see the track, and then hurrying onward, as if to escape his own tracks ; but always they followed him as fast.

“ In the hall of feasting, there was the bloody track to his chair. The learned men whom he consulted about this strange difficulty conferred with one another, and with him, who was equal to any of them, and pished and pshawed, and said, ‘ O, there is nothing miraculous in this ; it is only a natural infirmity, which can easily be put an end to, though, perhaps, the stoppage of such an evacuation will cause damage to other parts of the frame.’ Sir Forrester always said, ‘ Stop it, my learned brethren, if you can ; no matter what the consequences.’ And they did their best, but without result ; so that he was still compelled to leave his bloody track on their college rooms and combination rooms, the same as elsewhere ; and in street and in wilderness, — yes, and in the battlefield, — they said, his track looked freshest and reddest of all. So, at last, finding the notice he attracted inconvenient, this unfortunate lord deemed it best to go back to his own Hall, where, living among faithful old servants born in the family, he could hush the matter up better than elsewhere, and not be stared at continually, or, glancing round, see people holding up their hands in terror at seeing a

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

bloody track behind him. And so home he came, and there he saw the bloody track on the doorstep, and dolefully went into the hall, and up the stairs, an old servant ushering him into his chamber, and half a dozen others following behind, gazing, shuddering, pointing with quivering fingers, looking horror-stricken in one another's pale faces, and the moment he had passed, running to get fresh rushes, and to scour the stairs. The next day, Sir Forrester went into the wood, and by the aged oak he found a grave, and on the grave he beheld a beautiful crimson flower ; the most gorgeous and beautiful, surely, that ever grew ; so rich it looked, so full of potent juice. That flower he gathered ; and the spirit of his scientific pursuits coming upon him, he knew that this was the flower, produced out of a human life, that was essential to the perfection of his recipe for immortality ; and he made the drink, and drank it, and became immortal in woe and agony, still studying, still growing wiser and more wretched in every age. By and by he vanished from the old Hall, but not by death ; for, from generation to generation, they say that a bloody track is seen around that house, and sometimes it is tracked up into the chambers, so freshly that you see he must have passed a short time before ; and he grows wiser and wiser, and lonelier and lonelier, from age to age. And this is the legend of the bloody

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

footstep, which I myself have seen at the Hall door. As to the flower, the plant of it continued for several years to grow out of the grave; and after a while, perhaps a century ago, it was transplanted into the garden of —— Hall, and preserved with great care, and is so still. And as the family attribute a kind of sacredness, or cursedness, to the flower, they can hardly be prevailed upon to give any of the seeds, or allow it to be propagated elsewhere, though the king should send to ask it. It is said, too, that there is still in the family the old lord's recipe for immortality, and that several of his collateral descendants have tried to concoct it, and instil the flower into it, and so give indefinite life; but unsuccessfully, because the seeds of the flower must be planted in a fresh grave of bloody death, in order to make it effectual."

So ended Sibyl's legend; in which Septimius was struck by a certain analogy to Aunt Keziah's Indian legend, — both referring to a flower growing out of a grave; and also he did not fail to be impressed with the wild coincidence of this disappearance of an ancestor of the family long ago, and the appearance, at about the same epoch, of the first known ancestor of his own family, the man with wizard's attributes, with the bloody footstep, and whose sudden disappearance became a myth, under the idea that the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Devil carried him away. Yet, on the whole, this wild tradition, doubtless becoming wilder in Sibyl's wayward and morbid fancy, had the effect to give him a sense of the fantasticalness of his present pursuit, and that, in adopting it, he had strayed into a region long abandoned to superstition, and where the shadows of forgotten dreams go when men are done with them ; where past worships are ; where great Pan went when he died to the outer world ; a limbo into which living men sometimes stray when they think themselves sensiblest and wisest, and whence they do not often find their way back into the real world. Visions of wealth, visions of fame, visions of philanthropy, — all visions find room here, and glide about without jostling. When Septimius came to look at the matter in his present mood, the thought occurred to him that he had perhaps got into such a limbo, and that Sibyl's legend, which looked so wild, might be all of a piece with his own present life ; for Sibyl herself seemed an illusion, and so, most strangely, did Aunt Keziah, whom he had known all his life, with her homely and quaint characteristics ; the grim doctor, with his brandy and his German pipe, impressed him in the same way : and these, altogether, made his homely cottage by the wayside seem an unsubstantial edifice, such as castles in the air are built of, and the ground he trod on unreal ; and that grave, which he

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

knew to contain the decay of a beautiful young man, but a fictitious swell formed by the fantasy of his eyes. All unreal ; all illusion ! Was Rose Garfield a deception too, with her daily beauty, and daily cheerfulness, and daily worth ? In short, it was such a moment as I suppose all men feel (at least, I can answer for one), when the real scene and picture of life swims, jars, shakes, seems about to be broken up and dispersed, like the picture in a smooth pond, when we disturb its tranquil mirror by throwing in a stone ; and though the scene soon settles itself, and looks as real as before, a haunting doubt keeps close at hand, as long as we live, asking, "Is it stable ? Am I sure of it ? Am I certainly not dreaming ? See ; it trembles again, ready to dissolve."

Applying himself with earnest diligence to his attempt to decipher and interpret the mysterious manuscript, working with his whole mind and strength, Septimius did not fail of some flattering degree of success.

A good deal of the manuscript, as has been said, was in an ancient English script, although so uncouth and shapeless were the characters, that it was not easy to resolve them into letters, or to believe that they were anything but arbitrary and dismal blots and scrawls upon the yellow paper ; without meaning, vague, like the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

misty and undefined germs of thought as they exist in our minds before clothing themselves in words. These, however, as he concentrated his mind upon them, took distincter shape, like cloudy stars at the power of the telescope, and became sometimes English, sometimes Latin, strangely patched together, as if, so accustomed was the writer to use that language in which all the science of that age was usually embodied, that he really mixed it unconsciously with the vernacular, or used both indiscriminately. There was some Greek, too, but not much. Then frequently came in the cipher, to the study of which Septimius had applied himself for some time back, with the aid of the books borrowed from the college library, and not without success. Indeed, it appeared to him, on close observation, that it had not been the intention of the writer really to conceal what he had written from any earnest student, but rather to lock it up for safety in a sort of coffer, of which diligence and insight should be the key, and the keen intelligence with which the meaning was sought should be the test of the seeker's being entitled to possess the secret treasure.

Amid a great deal of misty stuff, he found the document to consist chiefly, contrary to his supposition beforehand, of certain rules of life; he would have taken it, on a casual inspection, for an essay of counsel, addressed by some great

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and sagacious man to a youth in whom he felt an interest, — so secure and good a doctrine of life was propounded, such excellent maxims there were, such wisdom in all matters that came within the writer's purview. It was as much like a digested synopsis of some old philosopher's wise rules of conduct as anything else. But on closer inspection, Septimius, in his unsophisticated consideration of this matter, was not so well satisfied. True, everything that was said seemed not discordant with the rules of social morality; not unwise: it was shrewd, sagacious; it did not appear to infringe upon the rights of mankind; but there was something left out, something unsatisfactory, — what was it? There was certainly a cold spell in the document; a magic, not of fire, but of ice; and Septimius the more exemplified its power, in that he soon began to be insensible of it. It affected him as if it had been written by some greatly wise and worldly-experienced man, like the writer of Ecclesiastes; for it was full of truth. It was a truth that does not make men better, though perhaps calmer, and beneath which the buds of happiness curl up like tender leaves in a frost. What was the matter with this document, that the young man's youth perished out of him as he read? What icy hand had written it, so that the heart was chilled out of the reader? Not that Septimius was

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

sensible of this character ; at least, not long, — for as he read, there grew upon him a mood of calm satisfaction, such as he had never felt before. His mind seemed to grow clearer ; his perceptions most acute ; his sense of the reality of things grew to be such, that he felt as if he could touch and handle all his thoughts, feel round about all their outline and circumference, and know them with a certainty, as if they were material things. Not that all this was in the document itself ; but by studying it so earnestly, and, as it were, creating its meaning anew for himself, out of such illegible materials, he caught the temper of the old writer's mind, after so many ages as that tract had lain in the mouldy and musty manuscript. He was magnetized with him ; a powerful intellect acted powerfully upon him ; perhaps, even, there was a sort of spell and mystic influence imbued into the paper, and mingled with the yellow ink, that steamed forth by the effort of this young man's earnest rubbing, as it were, and by the action of his mind, applied to it as intently as he possibly could ; and even his handling the paper, his bending over it, and breathing upon it, had its effect.

It is not in our power, nor in our wish, to produce the original form, nor yet the spirit, of a production which is better lost to the world : because it was the expression of a human intel-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

lect originally greatly gifted and capable of high things, but gone utterly astray, partly by its own subtlety, partly by yielding to the temptations of the lower part of its nature, by yielding the spiritual to a keen sagacity of lower things, until it was quite fallen ; and yet fallen in such a way, that it seemed not only to itself, but to mankind, not fallen at all, but wise and good, and fulfilling all the ends of intellect in such a life as ours, and proving, moreover, that earthly life was good, and all that the development of our nature demanded. All this is better forgotten ; better burnt ; better never thought over again ; and all the more, because its aspect was so wise, and even praiseworthy. But what we must preserve of it were certain rules of life and moral diet, not exactly expressed in the document, but which, as it were, on its being duly received into Septimius's mind, were precipitated from the rich solution, and crystallized into diamonds, and which he found to be the moral dietetics, so to speak, by observing which he was to achieve the end of earthly immortality, whose physical nostrum was given in the recipe which, with the help of Doctor Portsoaken and his Aunt Keziah, he had already pretty satisfactorily made out.

“ Keep thy heart at seventy throbs in a minute ; all more than that wears away life too quickly. If thy respiration be too quick, think

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

with thyself that thou hast sinned against natural order and moderation.

“ Drink not wine nor strong drink ; and observe that this rule is worthiest in its symbolic meaning.

“ Bask daily in the sunshine and let it rest on thy heart.

“ Run not ; leap not ; walk at a steady pace, and count thy paces per day.

“ If thou feelest, at any time, a throb of the heart, pause on the instant, and analyze it ; fix thy mental eye steadfastly upon it, and inquire why such commotion is.

“ Hate not any man nor woman ; be not angry, unless at any time thy blood seem a little cold and torpid ; cut out all rankling feelings, they are poisonous to thee. If, in thy waking moments, or in thy dreams, thou hast thoughts of strife or unpleasantness with any man, strive quietly with thyself to forget him.

“ Have no friendships with an imperfect man, with a man in bad health, of violent passions, of any characteristic that evidently disturbs his own life, and so may have disturbing influence on thine. Shake not any man by the hand, because thereby, if there be any evil in the man, it is likely to be communicated to thee.

“ Kiss no woman if her lips be red ; look not upon her if she be very fair. Touch not her hand if thy finger tips be found to thrill with

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

hers ever so little. On the whole, shun woman, for she is apt to be a disturbing influence. If thou love her, all is over, and thy whole past and remaining labor and pains will be in vain.

“Do some decent degree of good and kindness in thy daily life, for the result is a slight pleasurable sense that will seem to warm and delectate thee with felicitous self-laudings; and all that brings thy thoughts to thyself tends to invigorate that central principle by the growth of which thou art to give thyself indefinite life.

“Do not any act manifestly evil; it may grow upon thee, and corrode thee in after years. Do not any foolish good act; it may change thy wise habits.

“Eat no spiced meats. Young chickens, new-fallen lambs, fruits, bread four days old, milk, freshest butter, will make thy fleshy tabernacle youthful.

“From sick people, maimed wretches, afflicted people, — all of whom show themselves at variance with things as they should be, — from people beyond their wits, from people in a melancholic mood, from people in extravagant joy, from teething children, from dead corpses, turn away thine eyes and depart elsewhere.

“If beggars haunt thee, let thy servants drive them away, thou withdrawing out of earshot.

“Crying and sickly children, and teething children, as aforesaid, carefully avoid. Drink

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

the breath of wholesome infants as often as thou conveniently canst, — it is good for thy purpose ; also the breath of buxom maids, if thou mayest without undue disturbance of the flesh, drink it as a morning draught, as medicine ; also the breath of cows as they return from rich pasture at eventide.

“ If thou seest human poverty, or suffering, and it trouble thee, strive moderately to relieve it, seeing that thus thy mood will be changed to a pleasant self-laudation.

“ Practise thyself in a certain continual smile, for its tendency will be to compose thy frame of being, and keep thee from too much wear.

“ Search not to see if thou hast a gray hair ; scrutinize not thy forehead to find a wrinkle, nor the corners of thy eyes to discover if they be corrugated. Such things, being gazed at, daily take heart and grow.

“ Desire nothing too fervently, not even life ; yet keep thy hold upon it mightily, quietly, unshakably, for as long as thou really art resolved to live, Death, with all his force, shall have no power against thee.

“ Walk not beneath tottering ruins, nor houses being put up, nor climb to the top of a mast, nor approach the edge of a precipice, nor stand in the way of the lightning, nor cross a swollen river, nor voyage at sea, nor ride a skittish horse, nor be shot at by an arrow, nor con-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

front a sword, nor put thyself in the way of violent death ; for this is hateful, and breaketh through all wise rules.

“ Say thy prayers at bedtime, if thou deemest it will give thee quieter sleep ; yet let it not trouble thee if thou forgettest them.

“ Change thy shirt daily ; thereby thou castest off yesterday’s decay, and imbibest the freshness of the morning’s life, which enjoy with smelling to roses and other healthy and fragrant flowers, and live the longer for it. Roses are made to that end.

“ Read not great poets ; they stir up thy heart ; and the human heart is a soil which, if deeply stirred, is apt to give out noxious vapors.”

Such were some of the precepts which Septimius gathered and reduced to definite form out of this wonderful document ; and he appreciated their wisdom, and saw clearly that they must be absolutely essential to the success of the medicine with which they were connected. In themselves, almost, they seemed capable of prolonging life to an indefinite period, so wisely were they conceived, so well did they apply to the causes which almost invariably wear away this poor short life of men, years and years before even the shattered constitutions that they received from their forefathers need compel them to die. He deemed himself well rewarded for all his labor and pains, should nothing else fol-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

low but his reception and proper appreciation of these wise rules ; but continually, as he read the manuscript, more truths, and, for aught I know, profounder and more practical ones, developed themselves ; and, indeed, small as the manuscript looked, Septimius thought that he should find a volume as big as the most ponderous folio in the college library too small to contain its wisdom. It seemed to drip and distil with precious fragrant drops, whenever he took it out of his desk ; it diffused wisdom like those vials of perfume which, small as they look, keep diffusing an airy wealth of fragrance for years and years together, scattering their virtue in incalculable volumes of invisible vapor, and yet are none the less in bulk for all they give ; whenever he turned over the yellow leaves, bits of gold, diamonds of good size, precious pearls, seemed to drop out from between them.

And now ensued a surprise which, though of a happy kind, was almost too much for him to bear ; for it made his heart beat considerably faster than the wise rules of his manuscript prescribed. Going up on his hilltop, as summer wore away (he had not been there for some time), and walking by the little flowery hillock, as so many a hundred times before, what should he see there but a new flower, that during the time he had been poring over the manuscript so sedulously had developed itself, blossomed,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

put forth its petals, bloomed into full perfection, and now, with the dew of the morning upon it, was waiting to offer itself to Septimius? He trembled as he looked at it; it was too much almost to bear, — it was so very beautiful, so very stately, so very rich, so very mysterious and wonderful. It was like a person, like a life! Whence did it come? He stood apart from it, gazing in wonder; tremulously taking in its aspect, and thinking of the legends he had heard from Aunt Keziah and from Sibyl Dacy; and how that this flower, like the one that their wild traditions told of, had grown out of a grave, — out of a grave in which he had laid one slain by himself.

The flower was of the richest crimson, illuminated with a golden centre of a perfect and stately beauty. From the best descriptions that I have been able to gain of it, it was more like a dahlia than any other flower with which I have acquaintance; yet it does not satisfy me to believe it really of that species, for the dahlia is not a flower of any deep characteristics, either lively or malignant, and this flower, which Septimius found so strangely, seems to have had one or the other. If I have rightly understood, it had a fragrance which the dahlia lacks; and there was something hidden in its centre, a mystery, even in its fullest bloom, not developing itself so openly as the heartless, yet not dishon-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

est, dahlia. I remember in England to have seen a flower at Eaton Hall, in Cheshire, in those magnificent gardens, which may have been like this, but my remembrance of it is not sufficiently distinct to enable me to describe it better than by saying that it was crimson, with a gleam of gold in its centre, which yet was partly hidden. It had many petals of great richness.

Septimius, bending eagerly over the plant, saw that this was not to be the only flower that it would produce that season ; on the contrary, there was to be a great abundance of them, a luxuriant harvest ; as if the crimson offspring of this one plant would cover the whole hillock, — as if the dead youth beneath had burst into a resurrection of many crimson flowers ! And in its veiled heart, moreover, there was a mystery like death, although it seemed to cover something bright and golden.

Day after day the strange crimson flower bloomed more and more abundantly, until it seemed almost to cover the little hillock, which became a mere bed of it, apparently turning all its capacity of production to this flower ; for the other plants, Septimius thought, seemed to shrink away, and give place to it, as if they were unworthy to compare with the richness, the glory, and worth of this their queen. The fervent summer burned into it, the dew and

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

the rain ministered to it; the soil was rich, for it was a human heart contributing its juices, — a heart in its fiery youth sodden in its own blood, so that passion, unsatisfied loves and longings, ambition that never won its object, tender dreams and throbs, angers, lusts, hates, all concentrated by life, came sprouting in it, and its mysterious being, and streaks and shadows, had some meaning in each of them.

The two girls, when they next ascended the hill, saw the strange flower, and Rose admired it, and wondered at it, but stood at a distance, without showing an attraction towards it, rather an undefined aversion, as if she thought it might be a poison flower; at any rate, she would not be inclined to wear it in her bosom. Sibyl Dacy examined it closely, touched its leaves, smelt it, looked at it with a botanist's eye, and at last remarked to Rose, "Yes, it grows well in this new soil; methinks it looks like a new human life."

"What is the strange flower?" asked Rose.

"The *Sanguinea sanguinissima*," said Sibyl.

It so happened about this time that poor Aunt Keziah, in spite of her constant use of that bitter mixture of hers, was in a very bad state of health. She looked all of an unpleasant yellow, with bloodshot eyes; she complained terribly of her inwards. She had an ugly rheumatic hitch in her motion from place

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

to place, and was heard to mutter many wishes that she had a broomstick to fly about upon, and she used to bind up her head with a dish-clout, or what looked to be such, and would sit by the kitchen fire even in the warm days, bent over it, crouching as if she wanted to take the whole fire into her poor cold heart or gizzard, — groaning regularly with each breath a spiteful and resentful groan, as if she fought womanfully with her infirmities; and she continually smoked her pipe, and sent out the breath of her complaint visibly in that evil odor; and sometimes she murmured a little prayer, but somehow or other the evil and bitterness, acidity, pepperiness, of her natural disposition overcame the acquired grace which compelled her to pray, insomuch that, after all, you would have thought the poor old woman was cursing with all her rheumatic might. All the time an old, broken-nosed, brown earthen jug, covered with the lid of a black teapot, stood on the edge of the embers, steaming forever, and sometimes bubbling a little, and giving a great puff, as if it were sighing and groaning in sympathy with poor Aunt Keziah, and when it sighed there came a great steam of herby fragrance, not particularly pleasant, into the kitchen. And ever and anon, — half a dozen times it might be, — of an afternoon, Aunt Keziah took a certain bottle from a pri-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

vate receptacle of hers, and also a teacup, and likewise a little, old-fashioned silver teaspoon, with which she measured three teaspoonfuls of some spirituous liquor into the teacup, half filled the cup with the hot decoction, drank it off, gave a grunt of content, and for the space of half an hour appeared to find life tolerable.

But one day poor Aunt Keziah found herself unable, partly from rheumatism, partly from other sickness or weakness, and partly from dolorous ill spirits, to keep about any longer, so she betook herself to her bed; and betimes in the forenoon Septimius heard a tremendous knocking on the floor of her bed-chamber, which happened to be the room above his own. He was the only person in or about the house; so with great reluctance he left his studies, which were upon the recipe, in respect to which he was trying to make out the mode of concoction, which was told in such a mysterious way that he could not well tell either the quantity of the ingredients, the mode of trituration, nor in what way their virtue was to be extracted and combined.

Running hastily upstairs, he found Aunt Keziah lying in bed, and groaning with great spite and bitterness; so that, indeed, it seemed not improvidential that such an inimical state of mind towards the human race was accompanied with an almost inability of motion, else it

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

would not be safe to be within a considerable distance of her.

“Seppy, you good-for-nothing, are you going to see me lying here, dying, without trying to do anything for me?”

“Dying, Aunt Keziah?” repeated the young man. “I hope not! What can I do for you? Shall I go for Rose? or call a neighbor in? or the doctor?”

“No, no, you fool!” said the afflicted person. “You can do all that anybody can for me: and that is to put my mixture on the kitchen fire till it steams, and is just ready to bubble; then measure three teaspoonfuls—or it may be four, as I am very bad—of spirit into a teacup, fill it half full,—or it may be quite full, for I am very bad, as I said afore; six teaspoonfuls of spirit into a cup of mixture, and let me have it as soon as may be; and don’t break the cup, nor spill the precious mixture, for goodness knows when I can go into the woods to gather any more. Ah me! ah me! it’s a wicked, miserable world, and I am the most miserable creature in it. Be quick, you good-for-nothing, and do as I say!”

Septimius hastened down; but as he went a thought came into his head, which it occurred to him might result in great benefit to Aunt Keziah, as well as to the great cause of science and human good, and to the promotion of his

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

own purpose, in the first place. A day or two ago, he had gathered several of the beautiful flowers, and laid them in the fervid sun to dry; and they now seemed to be in about the state in which the old woman was accustomed to use her herbs, so far as Septimius had observed. Now if these flowers were really, as there was so much reason for supposing, the one ingredient that had for hundreds of years been missing out of Aunt Keziah's nostrum, — if it was this which that strange Indian sagamore had mingled with his drink with such beneficial effect, — why should not Septimius now restore it, and if it would not make his beloved aunt young again, at least assuage the violent symptoms, and perhaps prolong her valuable life some years, for the solace and delight of her numerous friends? Septimius, like other people of investigating and active minds, had a great tendency to experiment, and so good an opportunity as the present, where (perhaps he thought) there was so little to be risked at worst, and so much to be gained, was not to be neglected; so, without more ado, he stirred three of the crimson flowers into the earthen jug, set it on the edge of the fire, stirred it well, and when it steamed, threw up little scarlet bubbles, and was about to boil, he measured out the spirits, as Aunt Keziah had bidden him, and then filled the teacup.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“ Ah, this will do her good ; little does she think, poor old thing, what a rare and costly medicine is about to be given her. This will set her on her feet again.”

The hue was somewhat changed, he thought, from what he had observed of Aunt Keziah's customary decoction ; instead of a turbid yellow, the crimson petals of the flower had tinged it, and made it almost red ; not a brilliant red, however, nor the least inviting in appearance. Septimius smelt it, and thought he could distinguish a little of the rich odor of the flower, but was not sure. He considered whether to taste it ; but the horrible flavor of Aunt Keziah's decoction recurred strongly to his remembrance, and he concluded that were he evidently at the point of death, he might possibly be bold enough to taste it again ; but that nothing short of the hope of a century's existence at least would repay another taste of that fierce and nauseous bitterness. Aunt Keziah loved it ; and as she brewed, so let her drink.

He went upstairs, careful not to spill a drop of the brimming cup, and approached the old woman's bedside, where she lay, groaning as before, and breaking out into a spiteful croak the moment he was within earshot.

“ You don't care whether I live or die,” said she. “ You've been waiting in hopes I shall die, and so save yourself further trouble.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

"By no means, Aunt Keziah," said Septimius. "Here is the medicine, which I have warmed, and measured out, and mingled, as well as I knew how; and I think it will do you a great deal of good."

"Won't you taste it, Seppy, my dear?" said Aunt Keziah, mollified by the praise of her beloved mixture. "Drink first, dear, so that my sick old lips need not taint it. You look pale, Septimius; it will do you good."

"No, Aunt Keziah, I do not need it; and it were a pity to waste your precious drink," said he.

"It does not look quite the right color," said Aunt Keziah, as she took the cup in her hand. "You must have dropped some soot into it." Then, as she raised it to her lips, "It does not smell quite right. But, woe's me! how can I expect anybody but myself to make this precious drink as it should be?"

She drank it off at two gulps; for she appeared to hurry it off faster than usual, as if not tempted by the exquisiteness of its flavor to dwell upon it so long.

"You have not made it just right, Seppy," said she in a milder tone than before, for she seemed to feel the customary soothing influence of the draught, "but you'll do better the next time. It had a queer taste, methought; or is it that my mouth is getting out of taste? Hard

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

times it will be for poor Aunt Kezzy, if she 's to lose her taste for the medicine that, under Providence, has saved her life for so many years."

She gave back the cup to Septimius, after looking a little curiously at the dregs.

" It looks like bloodroot, don't it? " said she. " Perhaps it 's my own fault after all. I gathered a fresh bunch of the yarbs yesterday afternoon, and put them to steep, and it may be I was a little blind, for it was between daylight and dark, and the moon shone on me before I had finished. I thought how the witches used to gather their poisonous stuff at such times, and what pleasant uses they made of it, — but those are sinful thoughts, Seppy, sinful thoughts ! so I 'll say a prayer and try to go to sleep. I feel very noddy all at once."

Septimius drew the bedclothes up about her shoulders, for she complained of being very chilly, and, carefully putting her stick within reach, went down to his own room, and resumed his studies, trying to make out from those aged hieroglyphics, to which he was now so well accustomed, what was the precise method of making the elixir of immortality. Sometimes, as men in deep thought do, he rose from his chair, and walked to and fro the four or five steps or so that conveyed him from end to end of his little room. At one of these times he chanced

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

to look in the little looking-glass that hung between the windows, and was startled at the paleness of his face. It was quite white, indeed. Septimius was not in the least a foppish young man ; careless he was in dress, though often his apparel took an unsought picturesqueness that set off his slender, agile figure, perhaps from some quality of spontaneous arrangement that he had inherited from his Indian ancestry. Yet many women might have found a charm in that dark, thoughtful face, with its hidden fire and energy, although Septimius never thought of its being handsome, and seldom looked at it. Yet now he was drawn to it by seeing how strangely white it was, and, gazing at it, he observed that since he considered it last, a very deep furrow, or corrugation, or fissure, it might almost be called, had indented his brow, rising from the commencement of his nose towards the centre of the forehead. And he knew it was his brooding thought, his fierce, hard determination, his intense concentrativeness for so many months, that had been digging that furrow ; and it must prove indeed a potent specific of the life water that would smooth that away, and restore him all the youth and elasticity that he had buried in that profound grave.

But why was he so pale ? He could have supposed himself startled by some ghastly thing that he had just seen ; by a corpse in the next

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

room, for instance ; or else by the foreboding that one would soon be there ; but yet he was conscious of no tremor in his frame, no terror in his heart ; as why should there be any ? Feeling his own pulse, he found the strong, regular beat that should be there. He was not ill, nor affrighted ; not expectant of any pain. Then why so ghastly pale ? And why, moreover, Septimius, did you listen so earnestly for any sound in Aunt Keziah's chamber ? Why did you creep on tiptoe, once, twice, three times, up to the old woman's chamber, and put your ear to the key-hole, and listen breathlessly ? Well, it must have been that he was subconscious that he was trying a bold experiment, and that he had taken this poor old woman to be the medium of it, in the hope, of course, that it would turn out well ; yet with other views than her interest in the matter. What was the harm of that ? Medical men, no doubt, are always doing so, and he was a medical man for the time. Then why was he so pale ?

He sat down and fell into a reverie, which was partly suggested by that chief furrow which he had seen, and which we have spoken of, in his brow. He considered whether there was anything in this pursuit of his that used up life particularly fast ; so that, perhaps, unless he were successful soon, he should be incapable of renewal ; for, looking within himself, and con-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

sidering his mode of being, he had a singular fancy that his heart was gradually drying up, and that he must continue to get some moisture for it, or else it would soon be like a withered leaf. Supposing his pursuit were vain, what a waste he was making of that little treasure of golden days, which was his all ! Could this be called life, which he was leading now ? How unlike that of other young men ! How unlike that of Robert Hagburn, for example ! There had come news yesterday of his having performed a gallant part in the battle of Monmouth, and being promoted to be a captain for his brave conduct. Without thinking of long life, he really lived in heroic actions and emotions ; he got much life in a little, and did not fear to sacrifice a lifetime of torpid breaths, if necessary, to the ecstasy of a glorious death !

[It appears from a written sketch by the author of this story, that he changed his first plan of making Septimius and Rose lovers, and she was to be represented as his half-sister, and in the copy for publication this alteration would have been made. — E.D.]

And then Robert loved, too, loved his sister Rose, and felt, doubtless, an immortality in that passion. Why could not Septimius love too ? It was forbidden ! Well, no matter ; whom could he have loved ? Who in all this world would have been suited to his secret, brooding

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

heart, that he could have let her into its mysterious chambers, and walked with her from one cavernous gloom to another, and said, "Here are my treasures. I make thee mistress of all these ; with all these goods I thee endow." And then, revealing to her his great secret and purpose of gaining immortal life, have said : " This shall be thine, too. Thou shalt share with me. We will walk along the endless path together, and keep one another's hearts warm, and so be content to live."

Ah, Septimius ! but now you are getting beyond those rules of yours, which, cold as they are, have been drawn out of a subtle philosophy, and might, were it possible to follow them out, suffice to do all that you ask of them ; but if you break them, you do it at the peril of your earthly immortality. Each warmer and quicker throb of the heart wears away so much of life. The passions, the affections, are a wine not to be indulged in. Love, above all, being in its essence an immortal thing, cannot be long contained in an earthly body, but would wear it out with its own secret power, softly invigorating as it seems. You must be cold, therefore, Septimius ; you must not even earnestly and passionately desire this immortality that seems so necessary to you. Else the very wish will prevent the possibility of its fulfilment.

By and by, to call him out of these rhapso-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

dies, came Rose home ; and finding the kitchen hearth cold, and Aunt Keziah missing, and no dinner by the fire, which was smouldering, — nothing but the portentous earthen jug, which fumed, and sent out long, ill-flavored sighs, — she tapped at Septimius's door, and asked him what was the matter.

"Aunt Keziah has had an ill turn," said Septimius, "and has gone to bed."

"Poor auntie!" said Rose, with her quick sympathy. "I will this moment run up and see if she needs anything."

"No, Rose," said Septimius, "she has doubtless gone to sleep, and will awake as well as usual. It would displease her much were you to miss your afternoon school ; so you had better set the table with whatever there is left of yesterday's dinner, and leave me to take care of auntie."

"Well," said Rose, "she loves you best ; but if she be really ill, I shall give up my school and nurse her."

"No doubt," said Septimius, "she will be about the house again to-morrow."

So Rose ate her frugal dinner (consisting chiefly of purslain, and some other garden herbs, which her thrifty aunt had prepared for boiling), and went away as usual to her school ; for Aunt Keziah, as aforesaid, had never encouraged the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tender ministrations of Rose, whose orderly, womanly character, with its well-defined orb of daily and civilized duties, had always appeared to strike her as tame ; and she once said to her, "You are no squaw, child, and you'll never make a witch." Nor would she even so much as let Rose put her tea to steep, or do anything whatever for herself personally ; though, certainly, she was not backward in requiring of her a due share of labor for the general housekeeping.

Septimius was sitting in his room, as the afternoon wore away ; because, for some reason or other, or, quite as likely, for no reason at all, he did not air himself and his thoughts, as usual, on the hill ; so he was sitting musing, thinking, looking into his mysterious manuscript, when he heard Aunt Keziah moving in the chamber above. First she seemed to rattle a chair ; then she began a slow, regular beat with the stick which Septimius had left by her bedside, and which startled him strangely, — so that, indeed, his heart beat faster than the five-and-seventy throbs to which he was restricted by the wise rules that he had digested. So he ran hastily upstairs, and behold, Aunt Keziah was sitting up in bed, looking very wild, — so wild that you would have thought she was going to fly up chimney the next minute ; her gray hair all

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

dishevelled, her eyes staring, her hands clutching forward, while she gave a sort of howl, what with pain and agitation.

"Seppy! Seppy!" said she, — "Seppy, my darling! are you quite sure you remember how to make that precious drink?"

"Quite well, Aunt Keziah," said Septimius, inwardly much alarmed by her aspect, but preserving a true Indian composure of outward mien. "I wrote it down, and could say it by heart besides. Shall I make you a fresh pot of it? for I have thrown away the other."

"That was well, Seppy," said the poor old woman, "for there is something wrong about it; but I want no more, for, Seppy, dear, I am going fast out of this world, where you and that precious drink were my only treasures and comforts. I wanted to know if you remembered the recipe; it is all I have to leave you, and the more you drink of it, Seppy, the better. Only see to make it right!"

"Dear auntie, what can I do for you?" said Septimius, in much consternation, but still calm. "Let me run for the doctor, — for the neighbors? Something must be done!"

The old woman contorted herself as if there were a fearful time in her insides; and grinned, and twisted the yellow ugliness of her face, and groaned, and howled; and yet there was a tough and fierce kind of endurance with which she

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

fought with her anguish, and would not yield to it a jot, though she allowed herself the relief of shrieking savagely at it, — much more like a defiance than a cry for mercy.

“No doctor! no woman!” said she; “if my drink could not save me, what would a doctor’s foolish pills and powders do? And a woman! If old Martha Denton, the witch, were alive, I would be glad to see her. But other women! Pah! Ah! Ai! O! Phew! Ah, Seppy, what a mercy it would be now if I could set to and blaspheme a bit, and shake my fist at the sky! But I’m a Christian woman, Seppy, — a Christian woman.”

“Shall I send for the minister, Aunt Keziah?” asked Septimius. “He is a good man, and a wise one.”

“No minister for me, Seppy,” said Aunt Keziah, howling as if somebody were choking her. “He may be a good man, and a wise one, but he’s not wise enough to know the way to my heart, and never a man as was! Eh, Seppy, I’m a Christian woman, but I’m not like other Christian women; and I’m glad I’m going away from this stupid world. I’ve not been a bad woman, and I deserve credit for it, for it would have suited me a great deal better to be bad. O, what a delightful time a witch must have had, starting off up chimney on her broomstick at midnight, and looking down from aloft

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

in the sky on the sleeping village far below, with its steeple pointing up at her, so that she might touch the golden weathercock ! You, meanwhile, in such an ecstasy, and all below you the dull, innocent, sober humankind : the wife sleeping by her husband, or mother by her child, squalling with wind in its stomach ; the goodman driving up his cattle and his plough, — all so innocent, all so stupid, with their dull days just alike, one after another. And you up in the air, sweeping away to some nook in the forest ! Ha ! What's that ? A wizard ! Ha ! ha ! Known below as a deacon ! There is Goody Chickering ! How quietly she sent the young people to bed after prayers ! There is an Indian ; there a nigger ; they all have equal rights and privileges at a witch meeting. Phew ! the wind blows cold up here ! Why does not the Black Man have the meeting at his own kitchen hearth ? Ho ! ho ! O dear me ! But I'm a Christian woman and no witch ; but those must have been gallant times ! ”

Doubtless it was a partial wandering of the mind that took the poor old woman away on this old-witch flight ; and it was very curious and pitiful to witness the compunction with which she returned to herself and took herself to task for the preference which, in her wild nature, she could not help giving to harum-scarum wickedness over tame goodness. Now

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

she tried to compose herself, and talk reasonably and godly.

“ Ah, Septimius, my dear child, never give way to temptation, nor consent to be a wizard, though the Black Man persuade you ever so hard. I know he will try. He has tempted me, but I never yielded, never gave him his will; and never do you, my boy, though you, with your dark complexion, and your brooding brow, and your eye veiled, only when it suddenly looks out with a flash of fire in it, are the sort of man he seeks most, and that afterwards serves him. But don't do it, Septimius. But if you could be an Indian, methinks it would be better than this tame life we lead. 'T would have been better for me, at all events. O, how pleasant 't would have been to spend my life wandering in the woods, smelling the pines and the hemlock all day, and fresh things of all kinds, and no kitchen work to do, — not to rake up the fire, nor sweep the room, nor make the beds, — but to sleep on fresh boughs in a wigwam, with the leaves still on the branches that made the roof! And then to see the deer brought in by the red hunter, and the blood streaming from the arrow dart! Ah! and the fight too! and the scalping! and, perhaps, a woman might creep into the battle, and steal the wounded enemy away of her tribe and scalp him, and be praised for it! O Seppy, how I hate

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

the thought of the dull life women lead ! A white woman's life is so dull ! Thank Heaven, I'm done with it ! If I'm ever to live again, may I be whole Indian, please my Maker ! ”

After this goodly outburst, Aunt Keziah lay quietly for a few moments, and her skinny claws being clasped together, and her yellow visage grinning, as pious an aspect as was attainable by her harsh and pain-distorted features, Septimius perceived that she was in prayer. And so it proved by what followed, for the old woman turned to him with a grim tenderness on her face, and stretched out her hand to be taken in his own. He clasped the bony talon in both his hands.

“ Seppy, my dear, I feel a great peace, and I don't think there is so very much to trouble me in the other world. It won't be all housework, and keeping decent, and doing like other people there. I suppose I need n't expect to ride on a broomstick, — that would be wrong in any kind of a world, — but there may be woods to wander in, and a pipe to smoke in the air of heaven ; trees to hear the wind in, and to smell of, and all such natural, happy things ; and by and by I shall hope to see you there, Seppy, my darling boy ! Come by and by ; 't is n't worth your while to live forever, even if you should find out what's wanting in the drink I've taught you. I can see a little way into the next world

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

now, and I see it to be far better than this heavy and wretched old place. You 'll die when your time comes ; won't you, Seppy, my darling ? ”

“ Yes, dear auntie, when my time comes,” said Septimius. “ Very likely I shall want to live no longer by that time.”

“ Likely not,” said the old woman. “ I ’m sure I don’t. It is like going to sleep on my mother’s breast to die. So good-night, dear Seppy ! ”

“ Good-night, and God bless you, auntie ! ” said Septimius, with a gush of tears blinding him, spite of his Indian nature.

The old woman composed herself, and lay quite still and decorous for a short time ; then, rousing herself a little, “ Septimius,” said she, “ is there just a little drop of my drink left ? Not that I want to live any longer, but if I could sip ever so little, I feel as if I should step into the other world quite cheery, with it warm in my heart, and not feel shy and bashful at going among strangers.”

“ Not one drop, auntie.”

“ Ah, well, no matter ! It was not quite right, that last cup. It had a queer taste. What could you have put into it, Seppy, darling ? But no matter, no matter ! It’s a precious stuff, if you make it right. Don’t forget the herbs, Septimius. Something wrong had certainly got into it.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

These, except for some murmurings, some groanings and unintelligible whisperings, were the last utterances of poor Aunt Keziah, who did not live a great while longer, and at last passed away in a great sigh, like a gust of wind among the trees, she having just before stretched out her hand again and grasped that of Septimius; and he sat watching her and gazing at her, wondering and horrified, touched, shocked by death, of which he had so unusual a terror, — and by the death of this creature especially, with whom he felt a sympathy that did not exist with any other person now living. So long did he sit, holding her hand, that at last he was conscious that it was growing cold within his own, and that the stiffening fingers clutched him, as if they were disposed to keep their hold, and not forego the tie that had been so peculiar.

Then rushing hastily forth, he told the nearest available neighbor, who was Robert Hagburn's mother; and she summoned some of her gossips, and came to the house, and took poor Aunt Keziah in charge. They talked of her with no great respect, I fear, nor much sorrow, nor sense that the community would suffer any great deprivation in her loss; for, in their view, she was a dram-drinking, pipe-smoking, cross-grained old maid, and, as some thought, a witch; and, at any rate, with too much of the Indian

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

blood in her to be of much use; and they hoped that now Rose Garfield would have a pleasanter life, and Septimius study to be a minister, and all things go well, and the place be cheerfuller. They found Aunt Keziah's bottle in the cupboard, and tasted and smelt of it.

"Good West Indjy as ever I tasted," said Mrs. Hagburn; "and there stands her broken pitcher, on the hearth. Ah, empty! I never could bring my mind to taste it; but now I'm sorry I never did, for I suppose nobody in the world can make any more of it."

Septimius, meanwhile, had betaken himself to the hilltop, which was his place of refuge on all occasions when the house seemed too stifled to contain him; and there he walked to and fro, with a certain kind of calmness and indifference that he wondered at; for there is hardly anything in this world so strange as the quiet surface that spreads over a man's mind in his greatest emergencies: so that he deems himself perfectly quiet, and upbraids himself with not feeling anything, when indeed he is passion-stirred. As Septimius walked to and fro, he looked at the rich crimson flowers, which seemed to be blooming in greater profusion and luxuriance than ever before. He had made an experiment with these flowers, and he was curious to know whether that experiment had been the cause of Aunt Keziah's death. Not that he felt

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

any remorse therefor, in any case, or believed himself to have committed a crime, having really intended and desired nothing but good. I suppose such things (and he must be a lucky physician, methinks, who has no such mischief within his own experience) never weigh with deadly weight on any man's conscience. Something must be risked in the cause of science, and in desperate cases something must be risked for the patient's self. Septimius, much as he loved life, would not have hesitated to put his own life to the same risk that he had imposed on Aunt Keziah ; or, if he did hesitate, it would have been only because, if the experiment turned out disastrously in his own person, he would not be in a position to make another and more successful trial ; whereas, by trying it on others, the man of science still reserves himself for new efforts, and does not put all the hopes of the world, so far as involved in his success, on one cast of the die.

By and by he met Sibyl Dacy, who had ascended the hill, as was usual with her, at sunset, and came towards him, gazing earnestly in his face.

" They tell me poor Aunt Keziah is no more," said she.

" She is dead," said Septimius.

" The flower is a very famous medicine," said

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

the girl, "but everything depends on its being applied in the proper way."

"Do you know the way, then?" asked Septimius.

"No; you should ask Doctor Portsoaken about that," said Sibyl.

Doctor Portsoaken! And so he should consult him. That eminent chemist and scientific man had evidently heard of the recipe, and at all events would be acquainted with the best methods of getting the virtues out of flowers and herbs, some of which, Septimius had read enough to know, were poison in one phase and shape of preparation, and possessed of richest virtues in others; their poison, as one may say, serving as a dark and terrible safeguard, which Providence has set to watch over their preciousness; even as a dragon, or some wild and fiendish spectre, is set to watch and keep hidden gold and heaped-up diamonds. A dragon always waits on everything that is very good. And what would deserve the watch and ward of danger of a dragon, or something more fatal than a dragon, if not this treasure of which Septimius was in quest, and the discovery and possession of which would enable him to break down one of the strongest barriers of nature? It ought to be death, he acknowledged it, to attempt such a thing; for how changed would be life if he should succeed;

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

how necessary it was that mankind should be defended from such attempts on the general rule on the part of all but him. How could Death be spared? — then the sire would live forever, and the heir never come to his inheritance, and so he would at once hate his own father, from the perception that he would never be out of his way. Then the same class of powerful minds would always rule the state, and there would never be a change of policy.

[Here several pages are missing. — ED.]

Through such scenes Septimius sought out the direction that Doctor Portsoaken had given him, and came to the door of a house in the olden part of the town. The Boston of those days had very much the aspect of provincial towns in England, such as may still be seen there, while our own city has undergone such wonderful changes that little likeness to what our ancestors made it can now be found. The streets, crooked and narrow; the houses, many gabled, projecting, with latticed windows and diamond panes; without sidewalks; with rough pavements.

Septimius knocked loudly at the door, nor had long to wait before a serving maid appeared, who seemed to be of English nativity; and in reply to his request for Doctor Portsoaken bade him come in, and led him up a staircase with

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

broad landing places; then tapped at the door of a room, and was responded to by a gruff voice saying, "Come in!" The woman held the door open, and Septimius saw the veritable Doctor Portsoaken in an old, faded morning-gown, and with a nightcap on his head, his German pipe in his mouth, and a brandy bottle, to the best of our belief, on the table by his side.

"Come in, come in," said the gruff doctor, nodding to Septimius. "I remember you. Come in, man, and tell me your business."

Septimius did come in, but was so struck by the aspect of Doctor Portsoaken's apartment, and his gown, that he did not immediately tell his business. In the first place, everything looked very dusty and dirty, so that evidently no woman had ever been admitted into this sanctity of a place; a fact made all the more evident by the abundance of spiders, who had spun their webs about the walls and ceiling in the wildest apparent confusion, though doubtless each individual spider knew the cordage which he had lengthened out of his own miraculous bowels. But it was really strange. They had festooned their cordage on whatever was stationary in the room, making a sort of gray, dusky tapestry, that waved portentously in the breeze, and flapped, heavy and dismal, each with its spider in the centre of his own system. And what was most marvellous was a spider over the doctor's

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

head ; a spider, I think, of some South American breed, with a circumference of its many legs as big, unless I am misinformed, as a teacup, and with a body in the midst as large as a dollar ; giving the spectator horrible qualms as to what would be the consequence if this spider should be crushed, and, at the same time, suggesting the poisonous danger of suffering such a monster to live. The monster, however, sat in the midst of the stalwart cordage of his web, right over the doctor's head ; and he looked, with all those complicated lines, like the symbol of a conjurer or crafty politician in the midst of the complexity of his scheme ; and Septimius wondered if he were not the type of Doctor Portsoaken himself, who, fat and bloated as the spider, seemed to be the centre of some dark contrivance. And could it be that poor Septimius was typified by the fascinated fly, doomed to be entangled by the web ?

“ Good-day to you,” said the gruff doctor, taking his pipe from his mouth. “ Here I am, with my brother spiders, in the midst of my web. I told you, you remember, the wonderful efficacy which I had discovered in spiders' webs ; and this is my laboratory, where I have hundreds of workmen concocting my panacea for me. Is it not a lovely sight ? ”

“ A wonderful one, at least,” said Septimius. “ That one above your head, the monster, is

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

calculated to give a very favorable idea of your theory. What a quantity of poison there must be in him ! ”

“ Poison, do you call it ? ” quoth the grim doctor. “ That ’s entirely as it may be used. Doubtless his bite would send a man to kingdom come ; but, on the other hand, no one need want a better life line than that fellow’s web. He and I are firm friends, and I believe he would know my enemies by instinct. But come, sit down, and take a glass of brandy. No ? Well, I ’ll drink it for you. And how is the old aunt yonder, with her infernal nostrum, the bitterness and nauseousness of which my poor stomach has not yet forgotten ? ”

“ My Aunt Keziah is no more,” said Septimius.

“ No more ! Well, I trust in Heaven she has carried her secret with her,” said the doctor. “ If anything could comfort you for her loss, it would be that. But what brings you to Boston ? ”

“ Only a dried flower or two,” said Septimius, producing some specimens of the strange growth of the grave. “ I want you to tell me about them.”

The naturalist took the flowers in his hand, one of which had the root appended, and examined them with great minuteness and some surprise ; two or three times looking in Septi-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

mius's face with a puzzled and inquiring air ; then examined them again.

"Do you tell me," said he, "that the plant has been found indigenous in this country, and in your part of it? And in what locality?"

"Indigenous, so far as I know," answered Septimius. "As to the locality," — he hesitated a little, — "it is on a small hillock, scarcely bigger than a molehill, on the hilltop behind my house."

The naturalist looked steadfastly at him with red, burning eyes, under his deep, impending, shaggy brows ; then again at the flower.

"Flower, do you call it?" said he, after a reëxamination. "This is no flower, though it so closely resembles one, and a beautiful one, — yes, most beautiful. But it is no flower. It is a certain very rare fungus, — so rare as almost to be thought fabulous ; and there are the strangest superstitions, coming down from ancient times, as to the mode of production. What sort of manure had been put into that hillock? Was it merely dried leaves, the refuse of the forest, or something else?"

Septimius hesitated a little ; but there was no reason why he should not disclose the truth, — as much of it as Doctor Portsoaken cared to know.

"The hillock where it grew," answered he, "was a grave."

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“ A grave ! Strange ! strange ! ” quoth Doctor Portsoaken. “ Now these old superstitions sometimes prove to have a germ of truth in them, which some philosopher has doubtless long ago, in forgotten ages, discovered and made known ; but in process of time his learned memory passes away, but the truth, undiscovered, survives him, and the people get hold of it, and make it the nucleus of all sorts of folly. So it grew out of a grave ! Yes, yes ; and probably it would have grown out of any other dead flesh, as well as that of a human being ; a dog would have answered the purpose as well as a man. You must know that the seeds of fungi are scattered so universally over the world that, only comply with the conditions, and you will produce them everywhere. Prepare the bed it loves, and a mushroom will spring up spontaneously, an excellent food, like manna from heaven. So superstition says, kill your deadliest enemy, and plant him, and he will come up in a delicious fungus, which I presume to be this ; steep him, or distil him, and he will make an elixir of life for you. I suppose there is some foolish symbolism or other about the matter ; but the fact I affirm to be nonsense. Dead flesh under some certain conditions of rain and sunshine, not at present ascertained by science, will produce the fungus, whether the manure be friend, or foe, or cattle.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

"And as to its medical efficacy?" asked Septimius.

"That may be great for aught I know," said Portsoaken; "but I am content with my cobwebs. You may seek it out for yourself. But if the poor fellow lost his life in the supposition that he might be a useful ingredient in a recipe, you are rather an unscrupulous practitioner."

"The person whose mortal relics fill that grave," said Septimius, "was no enemy of mine (no private enemy, I mean, though he stood among the enemies of my country), nor had I anything to gain by his death. I strove to avoid aiming at his life, but he compelled me."

"Many a chance shot brings down the bird," said Doctor Portsoaken. "You say you had no interest in his death. We shall see that in the end."

Septimius did not try to follow the conversation among the mysterious hints with which the doctor chose to involve it; but he now sought to gain some information from him as to the mode of preparing the recipe, and whether he thought it would be most efficacious as a decoction or as a distillation. The learned chemist supported most decidedly the latter opinion, and showed Septimius how he might make for himself a simpler apparatus, with no better aids than Aunt Keziah's teakettle, and one or two trifling things, which the doctor himself sup-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

plied, by which all might be done with every necessary scrupulousness.

“Let me look again at the formula,” said he. “There are a good many minute directions that appear trifling, but it is not safe to neglect any minutiae in the preparation of an affair like this; because, as it is all mysterious and unknown ground together, we cannot tell which may be the important and efficacious part. For instance, when all else is done, the recipe is to be exposed seven days to the sun at noon. That does not look very important, but it may be. Then again, ‘Steep it in moonlight during the second quarter.’ That’s all moonshine, one would think; but there’s no saying. It is singular, with such preciseness, that no distinct directions are given whether to infuse, decoct, distil, or what other way; but my advice is to distil.”

“I will do it,” said Septimius, “and not a direction shall be neglected.”

“I shall be curious to know the result,” said Doctor Portsoaken, “and am glad to see the zeal with which you enter into the matter. A very valuable medicine may be recovered to science through your agency, and you may make your fortune by it; though, for my part, I prefer to trust to my cobwebs. This spider, now, is not he a lovely object? See, he is quite capable of knowledge and affection.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

There seemed, in fact, to be some mode of communication between the doctor and his spider, for on some sign given by the former, imperceptible to Septimius, the many-legged monster let himself down by a cord, which he extemporized out of his own bowels, and came dangling his huge bulk down before his master's face, while the latter lavished many epithets of endearment upon him, ludicrous, and not without horror, as applied to such a hideous production of nature.

"I assure you," said Doctor Portsoaken, "I run some risk from my intimacy with this lovely jewel, and if I behave not all the more prudently, your countrymen will hang me for a wizard, and annihilate this precious spider as my familiar. There would be a loss to the world; not small in my own case, but enormous in the case of the spider. Look at him now, and see if the mere uninstructed observation does not discover a wonderful value in him."

In truth, when looked at closely, the spider really showed that a care and art had been bestowed upon his make, not merely as regards curiosity, but absolute beauty, that seemed to indicate that he must be a rather distinguished creature in the view of Providence; so variegated was he with a thousand minute spots, spots of color, glorious radiance, and such a brilliance was attained by many conglomerated

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

brilliances ; and it was very strange that all this care was bestowed on a creature that, probably, had never been carefully considered except by the two pair of eyes that were now upon it, and that, in spite of its beauty and magnificence, could only be looked at with an effort to overcome the mysterious repulsiveness of its presence ; for all the time that Septimius looked and admired, he still hated the thing, and thought it wrong that it was ever born, and wished that it could be annihilated. Whether the spider was conscious of the wish, we are unable to say ; but certainly Septimius felt as if he were hostile to him, and had a mind to sting him ; and, in fact, Doctor Portsoaken seemed of the same opinion.

“Aha, my friend,” said he, “I would advise you not to come too near Orontes ! He is a lovely beast, it is true ; but in a certain recess of this splendid form of his he keeps a modest supply of a certain potent and piercing poison, which would produce a wonderful effect on any flesh to which he chose to apply it. A powerful fellow is Orontes ; and he has a great sense of his own dignity and importance, and will not allow it to be imposed on.”

Septimius moved from the vicinity of the spider, who, in fact, retreated, by climbing up his cord, and ensconced himself in the middle of his web, where he remained waiting for his prey.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Septimius wondered whether the doctor were symbolized by the spider, and was likewise waiting in the middle of his web for his prey. As he saw no way, however, in which the doctor could make a profit out of himself, or how he could be victimized, the thought did not much disturb his equanimity. He was about to take his leave, but the doctor, in a derisive kind of way, bade him sit still, for he purposed keeping him as a guest, that night, at least.

“I owe you a dinner,” said he, “and will pay it with a supper and knowledge; and before we part I have certain inquiries to make, of which you may not at first see the object, but yet are not quite purposeless. My familiar, up aloft there, has whispered me something about you, and I rely greatly on his intimations.”

Septimius, who was sufficiently common-sensible, and invulnerable to superstitious influences on every point except that to which he had surrendered himself, was easily prevailed upon to stay; for he found the singular, charlatanish, mysterious lore of the man curious, and he had enough of real science to at least make him an object of interest to one who knew nothing of the matter; and Septimius's acuteness, too, was piqued in trying to make out what manner of man he really was, and how much in him was genuine science and self-belief, and how much quackery and pretension and conscious

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

empiricism. So he stayed, and supped with the doctor at a table heaped more bountifully, and with rarer dainties, than Septimius had ever before conceived of; and in his simpler cognizance, heretofore, of eating merely to live, he could not but wonder to see a man of thought caring to eat of more than one dish, so that most of the meal, on his part, was spent in seeing the doctor feed and hearing him discourse upon his food.

“If man lived only to eat,” quoth the doctor, “one life would not suffice, not merely to exhaust the pleasure of it, but even to get the rudiments of it.”

When this important business was over, the doctor and his guest sat down again in his laboratory, where the former took care to have his usual companion, the black bottle, at his elbow, and filled his pipe, and seemed to feel a certain sullen, genial, fierce, brutal, kindly mood enough, and looked at Septimius with a sort of friendship, as if he had as lief shake hands with him as knock him down.

“Now for a talk about business,” said he.

Septimius thought, however, that the doctor’s talk began, at least, at a sufficient remoteness from any practical business; for he began to question about his remote ancestry, what he knew, or what record had been preserved, of the first emigrant from England; whence, from

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

what shire or part of England, that ancestor had come; whether there were any memorial of any kind remaining of him, any letters or written documents, wills, deeds, or other legal paper; in short, all about him.

Septimius could not satisfactorily see whether these inquiries were made with any definite purpose, or from a mere general curiosity to discover how a family of early settlement in America might still be linked with the old country; whether there were any tendrils stretching across the gulf of a hundred and fifty years by which the American branch of the family was separated from the trunk of the family tree in England. The doctor partly explained this.

"You must know," said he, "that the name you bear, Felton, is one formerly of much eminence and repute in my part of England, and, indeed, very recently possessed of wealth and station. I should like to know if you are of that race."

Septimius answered with such facts and traditions as had come to his knowledge respecting his family history; a sort of history that is quite as liable to be mythical, in its early and distant stages, as that of Rome, and, indeed, seldom goes three or four generations back without getting into a mist really impenetrable, though great, gloomy, and magnificent shapes of men often seem to loom in it, who, if they could be

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

brought close to the naked eye, would turn out as commonplace as the descendants who wonder at and admire them. He remembered Aunt Keziah's legend, and said he had reason to believe that his first ancestor came over at a somewhat earlier date than the first Puritan settlers, and dwelt among the Indians, where (and here the young man cast down his eyes, having the customary American abhorrence for any mixture of blood) he had intermarried with the daughter of a sagamore, and succeeded to his rule. This might have happened as early as the end of Elizabeth's reign, perhaps later. It was impossible to decide dates on such a matter. There had been a son of this connection, perhaps more than one, but certainly one son, who, on the arrival of the Puritans, was a youth, his father appearing to have been slain in some outbreak of the tribe, perhaps owing to the jealousy of prominent chiefs at seeing their natural authority abrogated or absorbed by a man of different race. He slightly alluded to the supernatural attributes that gathered round this predecessor, but in a way to imply that he put no faith in them ; for Septimius's natural keen sense and perception kept him from betraying his weakness to the doctor, by the same instinctive and subtle caution with which a madman can so well conceal his infirmity.

On the arrival of the Puritans, they had

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

found among the Indians a youth partly of their own blood, able, though imperfectly, to speak their language, — having, at least, some early recollections of it, — inheriting, also, a share of influence over the tribe on which his father had grafted him. It was natural that they should pay especial attention to this youth, consider it their duty to give him religious instruction in the faith of his fathers, and try to use him as a means of influencing his tribe. They did so, but did not succeed in swaying the tribe by his means, their success having been limited to winning the half-Indian from the wild ways of his mother's people, into a certain partial but decent accommodation to those of the English. A tendency to civilization was brought out in his character by their rigid training; at least, his savage wildness was broken. He built a house among them, with a good deal of the wigwam, no doubt, in its style of architecture, but still a permanent house, near which he established a cornfield, a pumpkin garden, a melon patch, and became farmer enough to be entitled to ask the hand of a Puritan maiden. There he spent his life, with some few instances of temporary relapse into savage wildness, when he fished in the river Musquehannah, or in Walden, or strayed in the woods, when he should have been planting or hoeing; but, on the whole, the race had been redeemed from

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

barbarism in his person, and in the succeeding generations had been tamed more and more. The second generation had been distinguished in the Indian wars of the provinces, and then intermarried with the stock of a distinguished Puritan divine, by which means Septimius could reckon great and learned men, scholars of old Cambridge, among his ancestry on one side, while on the other it ran up to the early emigrants, who seemed to have been remarkable men, and to that strange wild lineage of Indian chiefs, whose blood was like that of persons not quite human, intermixed with civilized blood.

"I wonder," said the doctor musingly, "whether there are really no documents to ascertain the epoch at which that old first emigrant came over, and whence he came, and precisely from what English family. Often the last heir of some respectable name dies in England, and we say that the family is extinct; whereas, very possibly, it may be abundantly flourishing in the New World, revived by the rich infusion of new blood in a new soil, instead of growing feebler, heavier, stupider, each year by sticking to an old soil, intermarrying over and over again with the same respectable families, till it has made common stock of all their vices, weaknesses, madnnesses. Have you no documents, I say, no muniment deed?"

"None," said Septimius.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

"No old furniture, desks, trunks, chests, cabinets?"

"You must remember," said Septimius, "that my Indian ancestor was not very likely to have brought such things out of the forest with him. A wandering Indian does not carry a chest of papers with him. I do remember, in my childhood, a little old iron-bound chest, or coffer, of which the key was lost, and which my Aunt Keziah used to say came down from her great-great-grandfather. I don't know what has become of it, and my poor old aunt kept it among her own treasures."

"Well, my friend, do you hunt up that old coffer, and, just as a matter of curiosity, let me see the contents."

"I have other things to do," said Septimius.

"Perhaps so," quoth the doctor, "but no other, as it may turn out, of quite so much importance as this. I'll tell you fairly: the heir of a great English house is lately dead, and the estate lies open to any well-sustained, perhaps to any plausible, claimant. If it should appear from the records of that family, as I have some reason to suppose, that a member of it, who would now represent the older branch, disappeared mysteriously and unaccountably, at a date corresponding with what might be ascertained as that of your ancestor's first appearance in this country; if any reasonable proof can be

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

brought forward, on the part of the representatives of that white sagamore, that wizard pow-wow, or however you call him, that he was the disappearing Englishman, why, a good case is made out. Do you feel no interest in such a prospect?"

"Very little, I confess," said Septimius.

"Very little!" said the grim doctor impatiently. "Do not you see that, if you make good your claim, you establish for yourself a position among the English aristocracy, and succeed to a noble English estate, an ancient hall, where your forefathers have dwelt since the Conqueror; splendid gardens, hereditary woods and parks, to which anything America can show is despicable, — all thoroughly cultivated and adorned, with the care and ingenuity of centuries; and an income, a month of which would be greater wealth than any of your American ancestors, raking and scraping for his lifetime, has ever got together, as the accumulated result of the toil and penury by which he has sacrificed body and soul?"

"That strain of Indian blood is in me yet," said Septimius, "and it makes me despise, — no, not despise; for I can see their desirableness for other people, — but it makes me reject for myself what you think so valuable. I do not care for these common aims. I have ambition, but it is for prizes such as other men cannot gain,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and do not think of aspiring after. I could not live in the habits of English life, as I conceive it to be, and would not, for my part, be burdened with the great estate you speak of. It might answer my purpose for a time. It would suit me well enough to try that mode of life, as well as a hundred others, but only for a time. It is of no permanent importance."

"I'll tell you what it is, young man," said the doctor testily, "you have something in your brain that makes you talk very foolishly; and I have partly a suspicion what it is, — only I can't think that a fellow who is really gifted with respectable sense in other directions should be such a confounded idiot in this."

Septimius blushed, but held his peace, and the conversation languished after this; the doctor grimly smoking his pipe, and by no means increasing the milkiness of his mood by frequent applications to the black bottle, until Septimius intimated that he would like to go to bed. The old woman was summoned, and ushered him to his chamber.

At breakfast, the doctor partially renewed the subject which he seemed to consider most important in yesterday's conversation.

"My young friend," said he, "I advise you to look in cellar and garret, or wherever you consider the most likely place, for that iron-bound coffer. There may be nothing in it; it

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

may be full of musty love letters, or old sermons, or receipted bills of a hundred years ago ; but it may contain what will be worth to you an estate of five thousand pounds a year. It is a pity the old woman with the damnable decoction is gone off. Look it up, I say."

"Well, well," said Septimius abstractedly, "when I can find time."

So saying, he took his leave, and retraced his way back to his home. He had not seemed like himself during the time that elapsed since he left it, and it appeared an infinite space that he had lived through and travelled over, and he fancied it hardly possible that he could ever get back again. But now, with every step that he took, he found himself getting miserably back into the old enchanted land. The mist rose up about him, the pale mist bow of ghostly promise curved before him ; and he trod back again, poor boy, out of the clime of real effort, into the land of his dreams and shadowy enterprise.

"How was it," said he, "that I can have been so untrue to my convictions? Whence came that dark and dull despair that weighed upon me? Why did I let the mocking mood which I was conscious of in that brutal, brandy-burnt sceptic have such an influence on me? Let him guzzle ! He shall not tempt me from my pursuit, with his lure of an estate and name among those heavy English beef-eaters of whom he is

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

a brother. My destiny is one which kings might envy, and strive in vain to buy with principalities and kingdoms.”

So he trod on air almost, in the latter parts of his journey, and instead of being wearied, grew more airy with the latter miles that brought him to his wayside home.

So now Septimius sat down and began in earnest his endeavors and experiments to prepare the medicine, according to the mysterious terms of the recipe. It seemed not possible to do it, so many rebuffs and disappointments did he meet with. No effort would produce a combination answering to the description of the recipe, which propounded a brilliant, gold-colored liquid, clear as the air itself, with a certain fragrance which was peculiar to it, and also, what was the more individual test of the correctness of the mixture, a certain coldness of the feeling, a chillness which was described as peculiarly refreshing and invigorating. With all his trials, he produced nothing but turbid results, clouded generally, or lacking something in color, and never that fragrance, and never that coldness which was to be the test of truth. He studied all the books of chemistry which at that period were attainable, — a period when, in the world, it was a science far unlike what it has since become ; and when Septimius had no instruction in this country, nor could obtain any beyond the dark, mysteri-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ous charlatanic communications of Doctor Portsoaken. So that, in fact, he seemed to be discovering for himself the science through which he was to work. He seemed to do everything that was stated in the recipe, and yet no results came from it ; the liquid that he produced was nauseous to the smell, — to taste it he had a horrible repugnance, turbid, nasty, reminding him in most respects of poor Aunt Keziah's elixir ; and it was a body without a soul, and that body dead. And so it went on ; and the poor, half-maddened Septimius began to think that his immortal life was preserved by the mere effort of seeking for it, but was to be spent in the quest, and was therefore to be made an eternity of abortive misery. He pored over the document that had so possessed him, turning its crabbed meanings every way, trying to get out of it some new light, often tempted to fling it into the fire which he kept under his retort, and let the whole thing go ; but then again, soon rising out of that black depth of despair, into a determination to do what he had so long striven for. With such intense action of mind as he brought to bear on this paper, it is wonderful that it was not spiritually distilled ; that its essence did not arise, purified from all alloy of falsehood, from all turbidness of obscurity and ambiguity, and form a pure essence of truth and invigorating motive, if of any it were capable. In this interval, Sep-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

timius is said by tradition to have found out many wonderful secrets that were almost beyond the scope of science. It was said that old Aunt Keziah used to come with a coal of fire from unknown furnaces, to light his distilling apparatus ; it was said, too, that the ghost of the old lord, whose ingenuity had propounded this puzzle for his descendants, used to come at midnight and strive to explain to him this manuscript ; that the Black Man, too, met him on the hilltop, and promised him an immediate release from his difficulties, provided he would kneel down and worship him, and sign his name in his book, an old, iron-clasped, much-worn volume, which he produced from his ample pockets, and showed him in it the names of many a man whose name has become historic, and above whose ashes kept watch an inscription testifying to his virtues and devotion, — old autographs, — for the Black Man was the original autograph collector.

But these, no doubt, were foolish stories, conceived and propagated in chimney corners, while yet there were chimney corners and firesides, and smoky flues. There was no truth in such things, I am sure ; the Black Man had changed his tactics, and knew better than to lure the human soul thus to come to him with his musty autograph book. So Septimius fought with his difficulty by himself, as many a beginner in science has done before him ; and to his efforts in this

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

way are popularly attributed many herb drinks, and some kinds of spruce beer, and nostrums used for rheumatism, sore throat, and typhus fever; but I rather think they all came from Aunt Keziah; or perhaps, like jokes to Joe Miller, all sorts of quack medicines, flocking at large through the community, are assigned to him or her. The people have a little mistaken the character and purpose of poor Septimius, and remember him as a quack doctor, instead of a seeker for a secret, not the less sublime and elevating because it happened to be unattainable.

I know not through what medium or by what means, but it got noised abroad that Septimius was engaged in some mysterious work; and, indeed, his seclusion, his absorption, his indifference to all that was going on in that weary time of war, looked strange enough to indicate that it must be some most important business that engrossed him. On the few occasions when he came out from his immediate haunts into the village, he had a strange, owl-like appearance, uncombed, unbrushed, his hair long and tangled; his face, they said, darkened with smoke; his cheeks pale; the indentation of his brow deeper than ever before; an earnest, haggard, sulking look; and so he went hastily along the village street, feeling as if all eyes might find out what he had in his mind from his appearance; taking

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

byways where they were to be found, going long distances through woods and fields, rather than short ones where the way lay through the frequented haunts of men. For he shunned the glances of his fellow men, probably because he had learnt to consider them not as fellows, because he was seeking to withdraw himself from the common bond and destiny, — because he felt, too, that on that account his fellow men would consider him as a traitor, an enemy, one who had deserted their cause, and tried to withdraw his feeble shoulder from under that great burden of death which is imposed on all men to bear, and which, if one could escape, each other would feel his load proportionably heavier. With these beings of a moment he had no longer any common cause ; they must go their separate ways, yet apparently the same, — they on the broad, dusty, beaten path, that seemed always full, but from which continually they so strangely vanished into invisibility, no one knowing, nor long inquiring, what had become of them ; he on his lonely path, where he should tread secure, with no trouble but the loneliness, which would be none to him. For a little while he would seem to keep them company, but soon they would all drop away, the minister, his accustomed townspeople, Robert Hagburn, Rose, Sibyl Dacy, — all leaving him in blessed un-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

knownness to adopt new temporary relations, and take a new course.

Sometimes, however, the prospect a little chilled him. Could he give them all up, — the sweet sister ; the friend of his childhood ; the grave instructor of his youth ; the homely, life-known faces ? Yes ; there were such rich possibilities in the future : for he would seek out the noblest minds, the deepest hearts in every age, and be the friend of human time. Only it might be sweet to have one unchangeable companion ; for, unless he strung the pearls and diamonds of life upon one unbroken affection, he sometimes thought that his life would have nothing to give it unity and identity ; and so the longest life would be but an aggregate of insulated fragments, which would have no relation to one another. And so it would not be one life, but many unconnected ones. Unless he could look into the same eyes, through the mornings of future time, opening and blessing him with the fresh gleam of love and joy ; unless the same sweet voice could melt his thoughts together ; unless some sympathy of a life side by side with his could knit them into one ; looking back upon the same things, looking forward to the same ; the long, thin thread of an individual life, stretching onward and onward, would cease to be visible, cease to be felt, cease, by and by,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

to have any real bigness in proportion to its length, and so be virtually non-existent, except in the mere inconsiderable Now. If a group of chosen friends, chosen out of all the world for their adaptedness, could go on in endless life together, keeping themselves mutually warm on the high, desolate way, then none of them need ever sigh to be comforted in the pitiable snugness of the grave. If one especial soul might be his companion, then how complete the fence of mutual arms, the warmth of close-pressing breast to breast ! Might there be one ! O Sibyl Dacy !

Perhaps it could not be. Who but himself could undergo that great trial, and hardship, and self-denial, and firm purpose, never wavering, never sinking for a moment, keeping his grasp on life like one who holds up by main force a sinking and drowning friend ? — how could a woman do it ! He must then give up the thought. There was a choice, — friendship, and the love of woman, — the long life of immortality. There was something heroic and ennobling in choosing the latter. And so he walked with the mysterious girl on the hilltop, and sat down beside her on the grave, which still ceased not to redden, portentously beautiful, with that unnatural flower, — and they talked together ; and Septimius looked on her weird beauty, and often said to himself, “ This, too, will pass away ;

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

she is not capable of what I am ; she is a woman. It must be a manly and courageous and forcible spirit, vastly rich in all three particulars, that has strength enough to live ! Ah, is it surely so ? There is such a dark sympathy between us, she knows me so well, she touches my inmost so at unawares, that I could almost think I had a companion here. Perhaps not so soon. At the end of centuries I might wed one ; not now."

But once he said to Sibyl Dacy, " Ah, how sweet it would be — sweet for me, at least — if this intercourse might last forever ! "

" That is an awful idea that you present," said Sibyl, with a hardly perceptible, involuntary shudder : " always on this hilltop, always passing and repassing this little hillock ; always smelling these flowers ! I always looking at this deep chasm in your brow ; you always seeing my bloodless cheek ! — doing this till these trees crumble away, till perhaps a new forest grew up wherever this white race had planted, and a race of savages again possess the soil. I should not like it. My mission here is but for a short time, and will soon be accomplished, and then I go."

" You do not rightly estimate the way in which the long time might be spent," said Septimius. " We would find out a thousand uses of this world, uses and enjoyments which now men

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

never dream of, because the world is just held to their mouths, and then snatched away again, before they have time hardly to taste it, instead of becoming acquainted with the deliciousness of this great world-fruit. But you speak of a mission, and as if you were now in performance of it. Will you not tell me what it is?"

"No," said Sibyl Dacy, smiling on him. "But one day you shall know what it is, — none sooner nor better than you, — so much I promise you."

"Are we friends?" asked Septimius, somewhat puzzled by her look.

"We have an intimate relation to one another," replied Sibyl.

"And what is it?" demanded Septimius.

"That will appear hereafter," answered Sibyl, again smiling on him.

He knew not what to make of this, nor whether to be exalted or depressed; but, at all events, there seemed to be an accordance, a striking together, a mutual touch of their two natures, as if, somehow or other, they were performing the same part of solemn music; so that he felt his soul thrill, and at the same time shudder. Some sort of sympathy there surely was, but of what nature he could not tell; though often he was impelled to ask himself the same question he asked Sibyl, "Are we friends?" because of a sudden shock and repulsion that came between

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

them, and passed away in a moment ; and there would be Sibyl, smiling askance on him.

And then he toiled away again at his chemical pursuits ; tried to mingle things harmoniously that apparently were not born to be mingled ; discovering a science for himself, and mixing it up with absurdities that other chemists had long ago flung aside ; but still there would be that turbid aspect, still that lack of fragrance, still that want of the peculiar temperature, that was announced as the test of the matter. Over and over again he set the crystal vase in the sun, and let it stay there the appointed time, hoping that it would digest in such a manner as to bring about the desired result.

One day, as it happened, his eyes fell upon the silver key which he had taken from the breast of the dead young man, and he thought within himself that this might have something to do with the seemingly unattainable success of his pursuit. He remembered, for the first time, the grim doctor's emphatic injunction to search for the little iron-bound box of which he had spoken, and which had come down with such legends attached to it ; as, for instance, that it held the Devil's bond with his great-great-grandfather, now cancelled by the surrender of the latter's soul ; that it held the golden key of Paradise ; that it was full of old gold, or of the dry leaves of a hundred years ago ; that it had a familiar

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

fiend in it, who would be exorcised by the turning of the lock, but would otherwise remain a prisoner till the solid oak of the box mouldered, or the iron rusted away ; so that between fear and the loss of the key, this curious old box had remained unopened, till itself was lost.

But now Septimius, putting together what Aunt Keziah had said in her dying moments, and what Doctor Portsoaken had insisted upon, suddenly came to the conclusion that the possession of the old iron box might be of the greatest importance to him. So he set himself at once to think where he had last seen it. Aunt Keziah, of course, had put it away in some safe place or other, either in cellar or garret, no doubt ; so Septimius, in the intervals of his other occupations, devoted several days to the search ; and not to weary the reader with the particulars of the quest for an old box, suffice it to say that he at last found it, amongst various other antique rubbish, in a corner of the garret.

It was a very rusty old thing, not more than a foot in length, and half as much in height and breadth ; but most ponderously iron-bound, with bars, and corners, and all sorts of fortification ; looking very much like an ancient almsbox, such as are to be seen in the older rural churches of England, and which seem to intimate great distrust of those to whom the funds are committed. Indeed, there might be a shrewd sus-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

picion that some ancient church beadle among Septimius's forefathers, when emigrating from England, had taken the opportunity of bringing the poorbox along with him. On looking close, too, there were rude embellishments on the lid and sides of the box in long-rusted steel, designs such as the Middle Ages were rich in ; a representation of Adam and Eve, or of Satan and a soul, nobody could tell which ; but, at any rate, an illustration of great value and interest. Septimius looked at this ugly, rusty, ponderous old box, so worn and battered with time, and recollected with a scornful smile the legends of which it was the object ; all of which he despised and discredited, just as much as he did that story in the Arabian Nights, where a demon comes out of a copper vase, in a cloud of smoke that covers the seashore ; for he was singularly invulnerable to all modes of superstition, all nonsense, except his own. But that one mode was ever in full force and operation with him. He felt strongly convinced that inside the old box was something that appertained to his destiny ; the key that he had taken from the dead man's breast, had that come down through time, and across the sea, and had a man died to bring and deliver it to him, merely for nothing ? It could not be.

He looked at the old, rusty, elaborated lock of the little receptacle. It was much flourished

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

about with what was once polished steel ; and certainly, when thus polished, and the steel bright with which it was hooped, defended, and inlaid, it must have been a thing fit to appear in any cabinet ; though now the oak was worm-eaten as an old coffin, and the rust of the iron came off red on Septimius's fingers, after he had been fumbling at it. He looked at the curious old silver key, too, and fancied that he discovered in its elaborate handle some likeness to the ornaments about the box ; at any rate, this he determined was the key of fate, and he was just applying it to the lock when somebody tapped familiarly at the door, having opened the outer one, and stepped in with a manly stride. Septimius, inwardly blaspheming, as secluded men are apt to do when any interruption comes, and especially when it comes at some critical moment of projection, left the box as yet unbroached, and said, " Come in."

The door opened, and Robert Hagburn entered ; looking so tall and stately, that Septimius hardly knew him for the youth with whom he had grown up familiarly. He had on the Revolutionary dress of buff and blue, with decorations that to the initiated eye denoted him an officer ; and certainly there was a kind of authority in his look and manner, indicating that heavy responsibilities, critical moments, had

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

educated him, and turned the ploughboy into a man.

“Is it you?” exclaimed Septimius. “I scarcely knew you. How war has altered you!”

“And I may say, Is it you? for you are much altered likewise, my old friend. Study wears upon you terribly. You will be an old man, at this rate, before you know you are a young one. You will kill yourself, as sure as a gun!”

“Do you think so?” said Septimius, rather startled, for the queer absurdity of the position struck him, if he should so exhaust and wear himself as to die, just at the moment when he should have found out the secret of everlasting life. “But though I look pale, I am very vigorous. Judging from that scar, slanting down from your temple, you have been nearer death than you now think me, though in another way.”

“Yes,” said Robert Hagburn; “but in hot blood, and for a good cause, who cares for death? And yet I love life; none better, while it lasts, and I love it in all its looks and turns and surprises, — there is so much to be got out of it, in spite of all that people say. Youth is sweet, with its fiery enterprise, and I suppose mature manhood will be just as much so, though in a calmer way, and age, quieter still, will have

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

its own merits, — the thing is only to do with life what we ought, and what is suited to each of its stages ; do all, enjoy all, — and I suppose these two rules amount to the same thing. Only catch real earnest hold of life, not play with it, and not defer one part of it for the sake of another, then each part of life will do for us what was intended. People talk of the hardships of military service, of the miseries that we undergo fighting for our country. I have undergone my share, I believe, — hard toil in the wilderness, hunger, extreme weariness, pinching cold, the torture of a wound, peril of death ; and really I have been as happy through it as ever I was at my mother's cosy fireside of a winter's evening. If I had died, I doubt not my last moments would have been happy. There is no use of life, but just to find out what is fit for us to do ; and, doing it, it seems to be little matter whether we live or die in it. God does not want our work, but only our willingness to work ; at least, the last seems to answer all his purposes."

"This is a comfortable philosophy of yours," said Septimius rather contemptuously, and yet enviously. "Where did you get it, Robert?"

"Where? Nowhere ; it came to me on the march ; and though I can't say that I thought it when the bullets pattered into the snow about me, in those narrow streets of Quebec,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

yet, I suppose, it was in my mind then ; for, as I tell you, I was very cheerful and contented. And you, Septimius? I never saw such a discontented, unhappy-looking fellow as you are. You have had a harder time in peace than I in war. You have not found what you seek, whatever that may be. Take my advice. Give yourself to the next work that comes to hand. The war offers place to all of us ; we ought to be thankful, — the most joyous of all the generations before or after us, — since Providence gives us such good work to live for, or such a good opportunity to die. It is worth living for, just to have the chance to die so well as a man may in these days. Come, be a soldier. Be a chaplain, since your education lies that way ; and you will find that nobody in peace prays so well as we do, we soldiers ; and you shall not be debarred from fighting, too ; if war is holy work, a priest may lawfully do it, as well as pray for it. Come with us, my old friend Septimius, be my comrade, and, whether you live or die, you will thank me for getting you out of the yellow forlornness in which you go on, neither living nor dying.”

Septimius looked at Robert Hagburn in surprise ; so much was he altered and improved by this brief experience of war, adventure, responsibility, which he had passed through. Not less than the effect produced on his loutish, rus-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tic air and deportment, developing his figure, seeming to make him taller, setting free the manly graces that lurked within his awkward frame,—not less was the effect on his mind and moral nature, giving freedom of ideas, simple perception of great thoughts, a free natural chivalry ; so that the knight, the Homeric warrior, the hero, seemed to be here, or possible to be here, in the young New England rustic ; and all that history has given, and hearts throbbed and sighed and gloried over, of patriotism and heroic feeling and action, might be repeated, perhaps, in the life and death of this familiar friend and playmate of his, whom he had valued not overhighly,—Robert Hagburn. He had merely followed out his natural heart, boldly and singly,—doing the first good thing that came to hand,—and here was a hero.

“You almost make me envy you, Robert,” said he, sighing.

“Then why not come with me?” asked Robert.

“Because I have another destiny,” said Septimius.

“Well, you are mistaken ; be sure of that,” said Robert. “This is not a generation for study, and the making of books ; that may come by and by. This great fight has need of all men to carry it on, in one way or another ; and no man will do well, even for himself, who

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tries to avoid his share in it. But I have said my say. And now, Septimius, the war takes much of a man, but it does not take him all, and what it leaves is all the more full of life and health thereby. I have something to say to you about this."

"Say it, then, Robert," said Septimius, who, having got over the first excitement of the interview, and the sort of exhilaration produced by the healthful glow of Robert's spirit, began secretly to wish that it might close, and to be permitted to return to his solitary thoughts again. "What can I do for you?"

"Why, nothing," said Robert, looking rather confused, "since all is settled. The fact is, my old friend, as perhaps you have seen, I have very long had an eye upon your sister Rose; yes, from the time we went together to the old schoolhouse, where she now teaches children like what we were then. The war took me away, and in good time, for I doubt if Rose would ever have cared enough for me to be my wife, if I had stayed at home, a country lout, as I was getting to be, in shirt sleeves and bare feet. But now, you see, I have come back, and this whole great war, to her woman's heart, is represented in me, and makes me heroic, so to speak, and strange, and yet her old familiar lover. So I found her heart tenderer for me than it was; and, in short, Rose has consented

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

to be my wife, and we mean to be married in a week ; my furlough permits little delay."

"You surprise me," said Septimius, who, immersed in his own pursuits, had taken no notice of the growing affection between Robert and his sister. "Do you think it well to snatch this little lull that is allowed you in the wild striving of war to try to make a peaceful home? Shall you like to be summoned from it soon? Shall you be as cheerful among dangers afterwards, when one sword may cut down two happinesses?"

"There is something in what you say, and I have thought of it," said Robert, sighing. "But I can't tell how it is; but there is something in this uncertainty, this peril, this cloud before us, that makes it sweeter to love and to be loved than amid all seeming quiet and serenity. Really, I think, if there were to be no death, the beauty of life would be all tame. So we take our chance, or our dispensation of Providence, and are going to love, and to be married, just as confidently as if we were sure of living forever."

"Well, old fellow," said Septimius, with more cordiality and outgush of heart than he had felt for a long while, "there is no man whom I should be happier to call brother. Take Rose, and all happiness along with her. She is a good girl, and not in the least like me. May you

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

live out your threescore years and ten, and every one of them be happy."

Little more passed, and Robert Hagburn took his leave with a hearty shake of Septimius's hand, too conscious of his own happiness to be quite sensible how much the latter was self-involved, strange, anxious, separated from healthy life and interests; and Septimius, as soon as Robert had disappeared, locked the door behind him, and proceeded at once to apply the silver key to the lock of the old strong box.

The lock resisted somewhat, being rusty, as might well be supposed after so many years since it was opened; but it finally allowed the key to turn, and Septimius, with a good deal of flutter at his heart, opened the lid. The interior had a very different aspect from that of the exterior; for, whereas the latter looked so old, this, having been kept from the air, looked about as new as when shut up from light and air two centuries ago, less or more. It was lined with ivory, beautifully carved in figures, according to the art which the mediæval people possessed in great perfection; and probably the box had been a lady's jewel casket formerly, and had glowed with rich lustre and bright colors at former openings. But now there was nothing in it of that kind, — nothing in keeping with those figures carved in the ivory representing some mythical subjects, — nothing but some papers

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

in the bottom of the box written over in an ancient hand, which Septimius at once fancied that he recognized as that of the manuscript and recipe which he had found on the breast of the young soldier. He eagerly seized them, but was infinitely disappointed to find that they did not seem to refer at all to the subjects treated by the former, but related to pedigrees and genealogies, and were in reference to an English family and some member of it who, two centuries before, had crossed the sea to America, and who, in this way, had sought to preserve his connection with his native stock, so as to be able, perhaps, to prove it for himself or his descendants ; and there was reference to documents and records in England in confirmation of the genealogy. Septimius saw that this paper had been drawn up by an ancestor of his own, the unfortunate man who had been hanged for witchcraft ; but so earnest had been his expectation of something different, that he flung the old papers down with bitter indifference.

Then again he snatched them up, and contemptuously read them, — those proofs of descent through generations of esquires and knights, who had been renowned in war ; and there seemed, too, to be running through the family a certain tendency to letters, for three were designated as of the colleges of Oxford or Cambridge ; and against one there was the note,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“he that sold himself to Sathan ;” and another seemed to have been a follower of Wickliffe ; and they had murdered kings, and been beheaded, and banished, and what not ; so that the age-long life of this ancient family had not been after all a happy or very prosperous one, though they had kept their estate, in one or another descendant, since the Conquest. It was not wholly without interest that Septimius saw that this ancient descent, this connection with noble families, and intermarriages with names, some of which he recognized as known in English history, all referred to his own family, and seemed to centre in himself, the last of a poverty-stricken line, which had dwindled down into obscurity, and into rustic labor and humble toil, reviving in him a little ; yet how little, unless he fulfilled his strange purpose. Was it not better worth his while to take this English position here so strangely offered him ? He had apparently slain unwittingly the only person who could have contested his rights, — the young man who had so strangely brought him the hope of unlimited life at the same time that he was making room for him among his forefathers. What a change in his lot would have been here, for there seemed to be some pretensions to a title, too, from a barony which was floating about and occasionally moving out of abeyancy !

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“Perhaps,” said Septimius to himself, “I may hereafter think it worth while to assert my claim to these possessions, to this position amid an ancient aristocracy, and try that mode of life for one generation. Yet there is something in my destiny incompatible, of course, with the continued possession of an estate. I must be, of necessity, a wanderer on the face of the earth, changing place at short intervals, disappearing suddenly and entirely; else the foolish, short-lived multitude and mob of mortals will be enraged with one who seems their brother, yet whose countenance will never be furrowed with his age, nor his knees totter, nor his force be abated; their little brevity will be rebuked by his age-long endurance, above whom the oaken roof-tree of a thousand years would crumble, while still he would be hale and strong. So that this house, or any other, would be but a resting place of a day, and then I must away into another obscurity.”

With almost a regret, he continued to look over the documents until he reached one of the persons recorded in the line of pedigree, — a worthy, apparently, of the reign of Elizabeth, to whom was attributed a title of Doctor in *Utriusque Juris*; and against his name was a verse of Latin written, for what purpose Septimius knew not, for, on reading it, it appeared to have no discoverable appropriateness; but sud-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

denly he remembered the blotted and imperfect hieroglyphical passage in the recipe. He thought an instant, and was convinced this was the full expression and outwriting of that crabbed little mystery ; and that here was part of that secret writing for which the Age of Elizabeth was so famous and so dexterous. His mind had a flash of light upon it, and from that moment he was enabled to read not only the recipe but the rules, and all the rest of that mysterious document, in a way which he had never thought of before ; to discern that it was not to be taken literally and simply, but had a hidden process involved in it that made the whole thing infinitely deeper than he had hitherto deemed it to be. His brain reeled, he seemed to have taken a draught of some liquor that opened infinite depths before him, he could scarcely refrain from giving a shout of triumphant exultation, the house could not contain him, he rushed up to his hilltop, and there, after walking swiftly to and fro, at length flung himself on the little hillock, and burst forth, as if addressing him who slept beneath.

“ O brother, O friend ! ” said he, “ I thank thee for thy matchless beneficence to me ; for all which I rewarded thee with this little spot on my hilltop. Thou wast very good, very kind. It would not have been well for thee, a youth of fiery joys and passions, loving to laugh,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

loving the lightness and sparkling brilliancy of life, to take this boon to thyself ; for, O brother ! I see, I see, it requires a strong spirit, capable of much lonely endurance, able to be sufficient to itself, loving not too much, dependent on no sweet ties of affection, to be capable of the mighty trial which now devolves on me. I thank thee, O kinsman ! Yet thou, I feel, hast the better part, who didst so soon lie down to rest, who hast done forever with this troublesome world, which it is mine to contemplate from age to age, and to sum up the meaning of it. Thou art disporting thyself in other spheres. I enjoy the high, severe, fearful office of living here, and of being the minister of Providence from one age to many successive ones."

In this manner he raved, as never before, in a strain of exalted enthusiasm, securely treading on air, and sometimes stopping to shout aloud, and feeling as if he should burst if he did not do so ; and his voice came back to him again from the low hills on the other side of the broad, level valley, and out of the woods afar, mocking him ; or as if it were airy spirits, that knew how it was all to be, confirming his cry, saying, " It shall be so," " Thou hast found it at last," " Thou art immortal." And it seemed as if Nature were inclined to celebrate his triumph over herself ; for, above the woods that crowned the hill to the northward, there were shoots and

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

streams of radiance, a white, a red, a many-colored lustre, blazing up high towards the zenith, dancing up, flitting down, dancing up again ; so that it seemed as if spirits were keeping a revel there. The leaves of the trees on the hillside, all except the evergreens, had now mostly fallen with the autumn ; so that Septimius was seen by the few passers-by, in the decline of the afternoon, passing to and fro along his path, wildly gesticulating, and heard to shout so that the echoes came from all directions to answer him. After nightfall, too, in the harvest moonlight, a shadow was still seen passing there, waving its arms in shadowy triumph ; so, the next day, there were various goodly stories afloat and astir, coming out of successive mouths, more wondrous at each birth ; the simplest form of the story being, that Septimius Felton had at last gone raving mad on the hilltop that he was so fond of haunting ; and those who listened to his shrieks said that he was calling to the Devil ; and some said that by certain exorcisms he had caused the appearance of a battle in the air, charging squadrons, cannon flashes, champions encountering ; all of which foreboded some real battle to be fought with the enemies of the country ; and as the battle of Monmouth chanced to occur, either the very next day, or about that time, this was supposed to be either caused or foretold by Septimius's eccentricities ; and as the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

battle was not very favorable to our arms, the patriotism of Septimius suffered much in popular estimation.

But he knew nothing, thought nothing, cared nothing about his country, or his country's battles ; he was as sane as he had been for a year past, and was wise enough, though merely by instinct, to throw off some of his superfluous excitement by these wild gestures, with wild shouts, and restless activity ; and when he had partly accomplished this he returned to the house, and, late as it was, kindled his fire, and began anew the processes of chemistry, now enlightened by the late teachings. A new agent seemed to him to mix itself up with his toil and to forward his purpose ; something helped him along ; everything became facile to his manipulation, clear to his thought. In this way he spent the night, and when at sunrise he let in the eastern light upon his study, the thing was done.

Septimius had achieved it. That is to say, he had succeeded in amalgamating his materials so that they acted upon one another, and in accordance ; and had produced a result that had a subsistence in itself, and a right to be ; a something potent and substantial ; each ingredient contributing its part to form a new essence, which was as real and individual as anything it was formed from. But in order to perfect it,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

there was necessity that the powers of nature should act quietly upon it through a month of sunshine ; that the moon, too, should have its part in the production ; and so he must wait patiently for this. Wait ! surely he would ! Had he not time for waiting ? Were he to wait till old age, it would not be too much ; for all future time would have it in charge to repay him.

So he poured the inestimable liquor into a glass vase, well secured from the air, and placed it in the sunshine, shifting it from one sunny window to another, in order that it might ripen ; moving it gently lest he should disturb the living spirit that he knew to be in it. And he watched it from day to day, watched the reflections in it, watched its lustre, which seemed to him to grow greater day by day, as if it imbibed the sunlight into it. Never was there anything so bright as this. It changed its hue, too, gradually, being now a rich purple, now a crimson, now a violet, now a blue ; going through all these prismatic colors without losing any of its brilliance, and never was there such a hue as the sunlight took in falling through it and resting on his floor. And strange and beautiful it was, too, to look through this medium at the outer world, and see how it was glorified and made anew, and did not look like the same world, although there were all its familiar marks. And

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

then, past his window, seen through this, went the farmer and his wife, on saddle and pillion, jogging to meeting-house or market ; and the very dog, the cow coming home from pasture, the old familiar faces of his childhood, looked differently. And so at last, at the end of the month, it settled into a most deep and brilliant crimson, as if it were the essence of the blood of the young man whom he had slain ; the flower being now triumphant, it had given its own hue to the whole mass, and had grown brighter every day ; so that it seemed to have inherent light, as if it were a planet by itself, a heart of crimson fire burning within it.

And when this had been done, and there was no more change, showing that the digestion was perfect, then he took it and placed it where the changing moon would fall upon it ; and then again he watched it, covering it in darkness by day, revealing it to the moon by night ; and watching it here, too, through more changes. And by and by he perceived that the deep crimson hue was departing, — not fading ; we cannot say that, because of the prodigious lustre which still pervaded it, and was not less strong than ever ; but certainly the hue became fainter, now a rose color, now fainter, fainter still, till there was only left the purest whiteness of the moon itself ; a change that somewhat disappointed and grieved Septimius, though still it

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

seemed fit that the water of life should be of no one richness, because it must combine all. As the absorbed young man gazed through the lonely nights at his beloved liquor, he fancied sometimes that he could see wonderful things in the crystal sphere of the vase ; as in Doctor Dee's magic crystal used to be seen, which now lies in the British Museum ; representations, it might be, of things in the far past, or in the further future, scenes in which he himself was to act, persons yet unborn, the beautiful and the wise, with whom he was to be associated, palaces and towers, modes of hitherto unseen architecture, that old hall in England to which he had a hereditary right, with its gables, and its smooth lawn ; the witch meetings in which his ancestor used to take part ; Aunt Keziah on her deathbed ; and, flitting through all, the shade of Sibyl Dacy, eying him from secret nooks, or some remoteness, with her peculiar mischievous smile, beckoning him into the sphere. All such visions would he see, and then become aware that he had been in a dream, superinduced by too much watching, too intent thought ; so that living among so many dreams, he was almost afraid that he should find himself waking out of yet another, and find that the vase itself and the liquid it contained were also dream-stuff. But no ; these were real.

There was one change that surprised him,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

although he accepted it without doubt; and, indeed, it did imply a wonderful efficacy, at least singularity, in the newly converted liquid. It grew strangely cool in temperature in the latter part of his watching it. It appeared to imbibe its coldness from the cold, chaste moon, until it seemed to Septimius that it was colder than ice itself; the mist gathered upon the crystal vase as upon a tumbler of iced water in a warm room. Some say it actually gathered thick with frost, crystallized into a thousand fantastic and beautiful shapes, but this I do not know so well. Only it was very cold. Septimius pondered upon it, and thought he saw that life itself was cold, individual in its being, a high, pure essence, chastened from all heats; cold, therefore, and therefore invigorating.

Thus much, inquiring deeply, and with painful research into the liquid which Septimius concocted, have I been able to learn about it, — its aspect, its properties; and now I suppose it to be quite perfect, and that nothing remains but to put it to such use as he had so long been laboring for. But this, somehow or other, he found in himself a strong reluctance to do; he paused, as it were, at the point where his pathway separated itself from that of other men, and meditated whether it were worth while to give up everything that Providence had provided, and take instead only this lonely gift of immortal life.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Not that he ever really had any doubt about it ; no, indeed ; but it was his security, his consciousness that he held the bright sphere of all futurity in his hand, that made him dally a little, now that he could quaff immortality as soon as he liked.

Besides, now that he looked forward from the verge of mortal destiny, the path before him seemed so very lonely. Might he not seek some one own friend — one single heart — before he took the final step ? There was Sibyl Dacy ! O, what bliss, if that pale girl might set out with him on his journey ! how sweet, how sweet, to wander with her through the places else so desolate ! for he could but half see, half know things, without her to help him. And perhaps it might be so. She must already know, or strongly suspect, that he was engaged in some deep, mysterious research ; it might be that, with her sources of mysterious knowledge among her legendary lore, she knew of this. Then, O, to think of those dreams which lovers have always had, when their new love makes the old earth seem so happy and glorious a place, that not a thousand nor an endless succession of years can exhaust it, — all those realized for him and her ! If this could not be, what should he do ? Would he venture onward into such a wintry futurity, symbolized, perhaps, by the coldness of the crystal goblet ? He shivered at the thought.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Now, what had passed between Septimius and Sibyl Dacy is not upon record, only that one day they were walking together on the hilltop, or sitting by the little hillock, and talking earnestly together. Sibyl's face was a little flushed with some excitement, and really she looked very beautiful ; and Septimius's dark face, too, had a solemn triumph in it that made him also beautiful ; so rapt he was after all those watchings, and emaciations, and the pure, unworldly, self-denying life that he had spent. They talked as if there were some foregone conclusion on which they based what they said.

"Will you not be weary in the time that we shall spend together ? " asked he.

"O no," said Sibyl, smiling, "I am sure that it will be very full of enjoyment."

"Yes," said Septimius, "though now I must remould my anticipations ; for I have only dared, hitherto, to map out a solitary existence."

"And how did you do that ? " asked Sibyl.

"O, there is nothing that would come amiss," answered Septimius ; "for, truly, as I have lived apart from men, yet it is really not because I have no taste for whatever humanity includes : but I would fain, if I might, live everybody's life at once, or, since that may not be, each in succession. I would try the life of power, ruling men ; but that might come later, after I had had long experience of men, and had lived

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

through much history, and had seen, as a disinterested observer, how men might best be influenced for their own good. I would be a great traveller at first; and as a man newly coming into possession of an estate goes over it, and views each separate field and woodlot, and whatever features it contains, so will I, whose the world is, because I possess it forever; whereas all others are but transitory guests. So will I wander over this world of mine, and be acquainted with all its shores, seas, rivers, mountains, fields, and the various peoples who inhabit them, and to whom it is my purpose to be a benefactor; for think not, dear Sibyl, that I suppose this great lot of mine to have devolved upon me without great duties, — heavy and difficult to fulfil, though glorious in their adequate fulfilment. But for all this there will be time. In a century I shall partially have seen this earth, and known at least its boundaries, — have gotten for myself the outline, to be filled up hereafter.”

“And I, too,” said Sibyl, “will have my duties and labors; for while you are wandering about among men, I will go among women, and observe and converse with them, from the princess to the peasant girl; and will find out what is the matter, that woman gets so large a share of human misery laid on her weak shoulders. I will see why it is that, whether she be a royal

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

princess, she has to be sacrificed to matters of state, or a cottage girl, still somehow the thing not fit for her is done ; and whether there is or no some deadly curse on woman, so that she has nothing to do, and nothing to enjoy, but only to be wronged by man, and still to love him, and despise herself for it, — to be shaky in her revenges. And then if, after all this investigation, it turns out — as I suspect — that woman is not capable of being helped, that there is something inherent in herself that makes it hopeless to struggle for her redemption, then what shall I do? Nay, I know not, unless to preach to the sisterhood that they all kill their female children as fast as they are born, and then let the generations of men manage as they can ! Woman, so feeble and crazy in body, fair enough sometimes, but full of infirmities ; not strong, with nerves prone to every pain ; ailing, full of little weaknesses, more contemptible than great ones ! ”

“ That would be a dreary end, Sibyl,” said Septimius. “ But I trust that we shall be able to hush up this weary and perpetual wail of womankind on easier terms than that. Well, dearest Sibyl, after we have spent a hundred years in examining into the real state of mankind, and another century in devising and putting in execution remedies for his ills, until our maturer thought has time to perfect his cure, we shall

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

then have earned a little playtime, — a century of pastime, in which we will search out whatever joy can be had by thoughtful people, and that childlike sportiveness which comes out of growing wisdom, and enjoyment of every kind. We will gather about us everything beautiful and stately, a great palace, for we shall then be so experienced that all riches will be easy for us to get; with rich furniture, pictures, statues, and all royal ornaments; and side by side with this life we will have a little cottage, and see which is the happiest, for this has always been a dispute. For this century we will neither toil nor spin, nor think of anything beyond the day that is passing over us. There is time enough to do all that we have to do.”

“A hundred years of play! Will not that be tiresome?” said Sibyl.

“If it is,” said Septimius, “the next century shall make up for it; for then we will contrive deep philosophies, take up one theory after another, and find out its hollowness and inadequacy, and fling it aside, the rotten rubbish that they all are, until we have strewn the whole realm of human thought with the broken fragments, all smashed up. And then, on this great mound of broken potsherds (like that great Monte Testaccio, which we will go to Rome to see), we will build a system that shall stand, and by which mankind shall look far into the ways of Pro-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

vidence, and find practical uses of the deepest kind in what it has thought merely speculation. And then, when the hundred years are over, and this great work done, we will still be so free in mind, that we shall see the emptiness of our own theory, though men see only its truth. And so, if we like more of this pastime, then shall another and another century, and as many more as we like, be spent in the same way."

"And after that another playday?" asked Sibyl Dacy.

"Yes," said Septimius, "only it shall not be called so; for the next century we will get ourselves made rulers of the earth; and knowing men so well, and having so wrought our theories of government and what not, we will proceed to execute them, — which will be as easy to us as a child's arrangement of its dolls. We will smile superior, to see what a facile thing it is to make a people happy. In our reign of a hundred years, we shall have time to extinguish errors, and make the world see the absurdity of them; to substitute other methods of government for the old, bad ones; to fit the people to govern itself, to do with little government, to do with none; and when this is effected, we will vanish from our loving people, and be seen no more, but be revered as gods, — we, meanwhile, being overlooked, and smil-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ing to ourselves, amid the very crowd that is looking for us."

"I intend," said Sibyl, making this wild talk wilder by that petulance which she so often showed, — "I intend to introduce a new fashion of dress when I am queen, and that shall be my part of the great reform which you are going to make. And for my crown, I intend to have it of flowers, in which that strange crimson one shall be the chief; and when I vanish, this flower shall remain behind, and perhaps they shall have a glimpse of me wearing it in the crowd. Well, what next?"

"After this," said Septimius, "having seen so much of affairs, and having lived so many hundred years, I will sit down and write a history, such as histories ought to be, and never have been. And it shall be so wise, and so vivid, and so self-evidently true, that people shall be convinced from it that there is some undying one among them, because only an eye-witness could have written it, or could have gained so much wisdom as was needful for it."

"And for my part in the history," said Sibyl, "I will record the various lengths of women's waists, and the fashion of their sleeves. What next?"

"By this time," said Septimius, — "how many hundred years have we now lived? — by this time, I shall have pretty well prepared myself

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

for what I have been contemplating from the first. I will become a religious teacher, and promulgate a faith, and prove it by prophecies and miracles ; for my long experience will enable me to do the first, and the acquaintance which I shall have formed with the mysteries of science will put the latter at my fingers' ends. So I will be a prophet, a greater than Mahomet, and will put all man's hopes into my doctrine, and make him good, holy, happy ; and he shall put up his prayers to his Creator, and find them answered, because they shall be wise, and accompanied with effort. This will be a great work, and may earn me another rest and pastime."

[He would see, in one age, the column raised in memory of some great deed of his in a former one.]

"And what shall that be?" asked Sibyl Dacy.

"Why," said Septimius, looking askance at her, and speaking with a certain hesitation, "I have learned, Sibyl, that it is a weary toil for a man to be always good, holy, and upright. In my life as a sainted prophet, I shall have somewhat too much of this ; it will be enervating and sickening, and I shall need another kind of diet. So, in the next hundred years, Sibyl, — in that one little century, — methinks I would fain be what men call wicked. How can I know my brethren, unless I do that once? I

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

would experience all. Imagination is only a dream. I can imagine myself a murderer, and all other modes of crime ; but it leaves no real impression on the heart. I must live these things."

[The rampant unrestraint, which is the characteristic of wickedness.]

"Good," said Sibyl quietly ; "and I too."

"And thou too !" exclaimed Septimius. "Not so, Sibyl. I would reserve thee, good and pure, so that there may be to me the means of redemption, — some stable hold in the moral confusion that I will create around myself, whereby I shall by and by get back into order, virtue, and religion. Else all is lost, and I may become a devil, and make my own hell around me ; so, Sibyl, do thou be good forever, and not fall nor slip a moment. Promise me !"

"We will consider about that in some other century," replied Sibyl composedly. "There is time enough yet. What next ?"

"Nay, this is enough for the present," said Septimius. "New vistas will open themselves before us continually, as we go onward. How idle to think that one little lifetime would exhaust the world ! After hundreds of centuries, I feel as if we might still be on the threshold. There is the material world, for instance, to perfect ; to draw out the powers of nature, so that man shall, as it were, give life to all modes of

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

matter, and make them his ministering servants. Swift ways of travel, by earth, sea, and air; machines for doing whatever the hand of man now does, so that we shall do all but put souls into our wheelwork and watchwork; the modes of making night into day, of getting control over the weather and the seasons; the virtues of plants, — these are some of the easier things thou shalt help me do.”

“ I have no taste for that,” said Sibyl, “ unless I could make an embroidery worked of steel.”

“ And so, Sibyl,” continued Septimius, pursuing his strain of solemn enthusiasm, intermingled as it was with wild, excursive vagaries, “ we will go on as many centuries as we choose. Perhaps, — yet I think not so, — perhaps, however, in the course of lengthened time, we may find that the world is the same always, and mankind the same, and all possibilities of human fortune the same; so that by and by we shall discover that the same old scenery serves the world’s stage in all ages, and that the story is always the same; yes, and the actors always the same, though none but we can be aware of it; and that the actors and spectators would grow weary of it, were they not bathed in forgetful sleep, and so think themselves new made in each successive lifetime. We may find that the stuff of the world’s drama, and the passions which

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

seem to play in it, have a monotony, when once we have tried them ; that in only once trying them, and viewing them, we find out their secret, and that afterwards the show is too superficial to arrest our attention. As dramatists and novelists repeat their plots, so does man's life repeat itself, and at length grows stale. This is what, in my desponding moments, I have sometimes suspected. What to do, if this be so ? ”

“ Nay, that is a serious consideration,” replied Sibyl, assuming an air of mock alarm, “ if you really think we shall be tired of life, whether or no.”

“ I do not think it, Sibyl,” replied Septimius. “ By much musing on this matter, I have convinced myself that man is not capable of debarring himself utterly from death, since it is evidently a remedy for many evils that nothing else would cure. This means that we have discovered of removing death to an indefinite distance is not supernatural ; on the contrary, it is the most natural thing in the world, — the very perfection of the natural, since it consists in applying the powers and processes of Nature to the prolongation of the existence of man, her most perfect handiwork ; and this could only be done by entire accordance and co-effort with Nature. Therefore Nature is not changed, and death remains as one of her steps, just as hereto-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

fore. Therefore, when we have exhausted the world, whether by going through its apparently vast variety, or by satisfying ourselves that it is all a repetition of one thing, we will call death as the friend to introduce us to something new."

[He would write a poem, or other great work, inappreciable at first, and live to see it famous,—himself among his own posterity.]

"O, insatiable love of life!" exclaimed Sibyl, looking at him with strange pity. "Canst thou not conceive that mortal brain and heart might at length be content to sleep?"

"Never, Sibyl!" replied Septimius, with horror. "My spirit delights in the thought of an infinite eternity. Does not thine?"

"One little interval — a few centuries only — of dreamless sleep," said Sibyl pleadingly. "Cannot you allow me that?"

"I fear," said Septimius, "our identity would change in that repose; it would be a Lethe between the two parts of our being, and with such disconnection a continued life would be equivalent to a new one, and therefore valueless."

In such talk, snatching in the fog at the fragments of philosophy, they continued fitfully; Septimius calming down his enthusiasm thus, which otherwise might have burst forth in madness, affrighting the quiet little village with the marvellous things about which they mused.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Septimius could not quite satisfy himself whether Sibyl Dacy shared in his belief of the success of his experiment, and was confident, as he was, that he held in his control the means of unlimited life ; neither was he sure that she loved him, — loved him well enough to undertake with him the long march that he propounded to her, making a union an affair of so vastly more importance than it is in the brief lifetime of other mortals. But he determined to let her drink the invaluable draught along with him, and to trust to the long future, and the better opportunities that time would give him, and his outliving all rivals, and the loneliness which an undying life would throw around her, without him, as the pledges of his success.

And now the happy day had come for the celebration of Robert Hagburn's marriage with pretty Rose Garfield, the brave with the fair ; and, as usual, the ceremony was to take place in the evening, and at the house of the bride ; and preparations were made accordingly : the wedding cake, which the bride's own fair hands had mingled with her tender hopes, and seasoned it with maiden fears, so that its composition was as much ethereal as sensual ; and the neighbors and friends were invited, and came with their best wishes and good will. For Rose shared not at all the distrust, the suspicion, or what-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ever it was, that had waited on the true branch of Septimius's family, in one shape or another, ever since the memory of man ; and all — except, it might be, some disappointed damsels who had hoped to win Robert Hagburn for themselves — rejoiced at the approaching union of this fit couple, and wished them happiness.

Septimius, too, accorded his gracious consent to the union, and while he thought within himself that such a brief union was not worth the trouble and feeling which his sister and her lover wasted on it, still he wished them happiness. As he compared their brevity with his long duration, he smiled at their little fancies of loves, of which he seemed to see the end ; the flower of a brief summer, blooming beautifully enough, and shedding its leaves, the fragrance of which would linger a little while in his memory, and then be gone. He wondered how far in the coming centuries he should remember this wedding of his sister Rose ; perhaps he would meet, five hundred years hence, some descendant of the marriage, — a fair girl, bearing the traits of his sister's fresh beauty ; a young man, recalling the strength and manly comeliness of Robert Hagburn, — and could claim acquaintance and kindred. He would be the guardian, from generation to generation, of this race ; their ever reappearing friend at times of need ; and meeting them from age to age, would find tradi-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

tions of himself growing poetical in the lapse of time ; so that he would smile at seeing his features look so much more majestic in their fancies than in reality. So all along their course, in the history of the family, he would trace himself, and by his traditions he would make them acquainted with all their ancestors, and so still be warmed by kindred blood.

And Robert Hagburn, full of the life of the moment, warm with generous blood, came in a new uniform, looking fit to be the founder of a race who should look back to a hero sire. He greeted Septimius as a brother. The minister, too, came, of course, and mingled with the throng, with decorous aspect, and greeted Septimius with more formality than he had been wont ; for Septimius had insensibly withdrawn himself from the minister's intimacy, as he got deeper and deeper into the enthusiasm of his own cause. Besides, the minister did not fail to see that his once devoted scholar had contracted habits of study into the secrets of which he himself was not admitted, and that he no longer alluded to studies for the ministry ; and he was inclined to suspect that Septimius had unfortunately allowed infidel ideas to assail, at least, if not to overcome, that fortress of firm faith, which he had striven to found and strengthen in his mind,—a misfortune frequently befalling speculative and imaginative

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and melancholic persons, like Septimius, whom the Devil is all the time planning to assault, because he feels confident of having a traitor in the garrison. The minister had heard that this was the fashion of Septimius's family, and that even the famous divine, who, in his eyes, was the glory of it, had had his season of wild infidelity in his youth, before grace touched him; and had always thereafter, throughout his long and pious life, been subject to seasons of black and sulphurous despondency, during which he disbelieved the faith which, at other times, he preached powerfully.

"Septimius, my young friend," said he; "are you yet ready to be a preacher of the truth?"

"Not yet, reverend pastor," said Septimius, smiling at the thought of the day before, that the career of a prophet would be one that he should some time assume. "There will be time enough to preach the truth when I better know it."

"You do not look as if you knew it so well as formerly, instead of better," said his reverend friend, looking into the deep furrows of his brow, and into his wild and troubled eyes.

"Perhaps not," said Septimius. "There is time yet."

These few words passed amid the bustle and murmur of the evening, while the guests were assembling, and all were awaiting the marriage

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

with that interest which the event continually brings with it, common as it is, so that nothing but death is commoner. Everybody congratulated the modest Rose, who looked quiet and happy ; and so she stood up at the proper time, and the minister married them with a certain fervor and individual application, that made them feel they were married indeed. Then there ensued a salutation of the bride, the first to kiss her being the minister, and then some respectable old justices and farmers, each with his friendly smile and joke. Then went round the cake and wine, and other good cheer, and the hereditary jokes with which brides used to be assailed in those days. I think, too, there was a dance, though how the couples in the reel found space to foot it in the little room, I cannot imagine ; at any rate, there was a bright light out of the windows, gleaming across the road, and such a sound of the babble of numerous voices and merriment, that travellers passing by, on the lonely Lexington road, wished they were of the party ; and one or two of them stopped and went in, and saw the new-made bride, drank to her health, and took a piece of the wedding cake home to dream upon.

[It is to be observed that Rose had requested of her friend, Sibyl Dacy, to act as one of her bridesmaids, of whom she had only the modest number of two ; and the strange girl declined, saying that

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

her intermeddling would bring ill fortune to the marriage.]

“Why do you talk such nonsense, Sibyl?” asked Rose. “You love me, I am sure, and wish me well; and your smile, such as it is, will be the promise of prosperity, and I wish for it on my wedding day.”

“I am an ill fate, a sinister demon, Rose; a thing that has sprung out of a grave; and you had better not entreat me to twine my poison tendrils round your destinies. You would repent it.”

“O, hush, hush!” said Rose, putting her hand over her friend’s mouth. “Naughty one! you can bless me, if you will, only you are wayward.”

“Bless you, then, dearest Rose, and all happiness on your marriage!”

Septimius had been duly present at the marriage, and kissed his sister with moist eyes, it is said, and a solemn smile, as he gave her into the keeping of Robert Hagburn; and there was something in the words he then used that afterwards dwelt on her mind, as if they had a meaning in them that asked to be sought into, and needed reply.

“There, Rose,” he had said, “I have made myself ready for my destiny. I have no ties any more, and may set forth on my path without scruple.”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

“Am I not your sister still, Septimius?” said she, shedding a tear or two.

“A married woman is no sister; nothing but a married woman till she becomes a mother; and then what shall I have to do with you?”

He spoke with a certain eagerness to prove his case, which Rose could not understand, but which was probably to justify himself in severing, as he was about to do, the link that connected him with his race, and making for himself an exceptional destiny, which, if it did not entirely insulate him, would at least create new relations with all. There he stood, poor fellow, looking on the mirthful throng, not in exultation, as might have been supposed, but with a strange sadness upon him. It seemed to him, at that final moment, as if it were Death that linked together all; yes, and so gave the warmth to all. Wedlock itself seemed a brother of Death; wedlock, and its sweetest hopes, its holy companionship, its mysteries, and all that warm mysterious brotherhood that is between men; passing as they do from mystery to mystery in a little gleam of light; that wild, sweet charm of uncertainty and temporariness, — how lovely it made them all, how innocent, even the worst of them; how hard and prosaic was his own situation in comparison to theirs. He felt a gushing tenderness for them,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

as if he would have flung aside his endless life, and rushed among them, saying, —

“ Embrace me ! I am still one of you, and will not leave you ! Hold me fast ! ”

After this it was not particularly observed that both Septimius and Sibyl Dacy had disappeared from the party, which, however, went on no less merrily without them. In truth, the habits of Sibyl Dacy were so wayward, and little squared by general rules, that nobody wondered or tried to account for them ; and as for Septimius, he was such a studious man, so little accustomed to mingle with his fellow citizens on any occasion, that it was rather wondered at that he should have spent so large a part of a sociable evening with them, than that he should now retire.

After they were gone the party received an unexpected addition, being no other than the excellent Doctor Portsoaken, who came to the door, announcing that he had just arrived on horseback from Boston, and that, his object being to have an interview with Sibyl Dacy, he had been to Robert Hagburn's house in quest of her ; but, learning from the old grandmother that she was here, he had followed.

Not finding her, he evinced no alarm, but was easily induced to sit down among the merry company, and partake of some brandy, which, with other liquors, Robert had pro-

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

vided in sufficient abundance; and that being a day when man had not learned to fear the glass, the doctor found them all in a state of hilarious chat. Taking out his German pipe, he joined the group of smokers in the great chimney corner, and entered into conversation with them, laughing and joking, and mixing up his jests with that mysterious suspicion which gave so strange a character to his intercourse.

"It is good fortune, Mr. Hagburn," quoth he, "that brings me here on this auspicious day. And how has been my learned young friend Doctor Septimius, — for so he should be called, — and how have flourished his studies of late? The scientific world may look for great fruits from that decoction of his."

"He'll never equal Aunt Keziah for herb drinks," said an old woman, smoking her pipe in the corner, "though I think' likely he'll make a good doctor enough by and by. Poor Kezzy, she took a drop too much of her mixture, after all. I used to tell her how it would be; for Kezzy and I were pretty good friends once, before the Indian in her came out so strongly, — the squaw and the witch, for she had them both in her blood, poor yellow Kezzy!"

"Yes! had she indeed?" quoth the doctor; "and I have heard an odd story, that if the Feltons chose to go back to the old country,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

they'd find a home and an estate there ready for them."

The old woman mused, and puffed at her pipe. "Ah, yes," muttered she, at length, "I remember to have heard something about that; and how, if Felton chose to strike into the woods, he'd find a tribe of wild Indians there ready to take him for their sagamore, and conquer the whites; and how, if he chose to go to England, there was a great old house all ready for him, and a fire burning in the hall, and a dinner table spread, and the tall-posted bed ready, with clean sheets, in the best chamber, and a man waiting at the gate to show him in. Only there was a spell of a bloody footstep left on the threshold by the last that came out, so that none of his posterity could ever cross it again. But that was all nonsense!"

"Strange old things one dreams in a chimney corner," quoth the doctor. "Do you remember any more of this?"

"No, no; I'm so forgetful nowadays," said old Mrs. Hagburn; "only it seems as if I had my memories in my pipe, and they curl up in smoke. I've known these Feltons all along, or it seems as if I had; for I'm nigh ninety years old now, and I was two year old in the witch's time, and I have seen a piece of the halter that old Felton was hung with."

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

Some of the company laughed.

"That must have been a curious sight," quoth the doctor.

"It is not well," said the minister seriously to the doctor, "to stir up these old remembrances, making the poor old lady appear absurd. I know not that she need to be ashamed of showing the weaknesses of the generation to which she belonged; but I do not like to see old age put at this disadvantage among the young."

"Nay, my good and reverend sir," returned the doctor, "I mean no such disrespect as you seem to think. Forbid it, ye upper powers, that I should cast any ridicule on beliefs,—superstitions, do you call them?—that are as worthy of faith, for aught I know, as any that are preached in the pulpit. If the old lady would tell me any secret of the old Felton's science, I shall treasure it sacredly; for I interpret these stories about his miraculous gifts as meaning that he had a great command over natural science, the virtues of plants, the capacities of the human body."

While these things were passing, or before they passed, or some time in that eventful night, Septimius had withdrawn to his study, when there was a low tap at the door, and, opening it, Sibyl Dacy stood before him. It seemed as

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

if there had been a previous arrangement between them ; for Septimius evinced no surprise, only took her hand and drew her in.

“ How cold your hand is ! ” he exclaimed. “ Nothing is so cold, except it be the potent medicine. It makes me shiver.”

“ Never mind that,” said Sibyl. “ You look frightened at me.”

“ Do I ? ” said Septimius. “ No, not that ; but this is such a crisis ; and methinks it is not yourself. Your eyes glare on me strangely.”

“ Ah, yes ; and you are not frightened at me ? Well, I will try not to be frightened at myself. Time was, however, when I should have been.”

She looked round at Septimius’s study, with its few old books, its implements of science, crucibles, retorts, and electrical machines ; all these she noticed little ; but on the table drawn before the fire, there was something that attracted her attention ; it was a vase that seemed of crystal, made in that old fashion in which the Venetians made their glasses, — a most pure kind of glass, with a long stalk, within which was a curved elaboration of fancy work, wreathed and twisted. This old glass was an heirloom of the Feltons, a relic that had come down with many traditions, bringing its frail fabric safely through all the perils of time, that had shattered empires ; and, if space sufficed, I could tell many stories of this curious vase, which was

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

said, in its time, to have been the instrument both of the Devil's sacrament in the forest, and of the Christian in the village meeting-house. But, at any rate, it had been a part of the choice household gear of one of Septimius's ancestors, and was engraved with his arms, artistically done.

"Is that the drink of immortality?" said Sibyl.

"Yes, Sibyl," said Septimius. "Do but touch the goblet; see how cold it is."

She put her slender, pallid fingers on the side of the goblet, and shuddered, just as Septimius did when he touched her hand.

"Why should it be so cold?" said she, looking at Septimius.

"Nay, I know not, unless because endless life goes round the circle and meets death, and is just the same with it. O Sibyl, it is a fearful thing that I have accomplished! Do you not feel it so? What if this shiver should last us through eternity?"

"Have you pursued this object so long," said Sibyl, "to have these fears respecting it now? In that case, methinks I could be bold enough to drink it alone, and look down upon you, as I did so, smiling at your fear to take the life offered you."

"I do not fear," said Septimius; "but yet I acknowledge there is a strange, powerful abhorrence in me towards this draught, which I know

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

not how to account for, except as the reaction, the revulsion of feeling, consequent upon its being too long overstrained in one direction. I cannot help it. The meannesses, the littlenesses, the perplexities, the general irksomeness of life, weigh upon me strangely. Thou didst refuse to drink with me. That being the case, methinks I could break the jewelled goblet now, untasted, and choose the grave as the wiser part."

"The beautiful goblet! What a pity to break it!" said Sibyl, with her characteristic malign and mysterious smile. "You cannot find it in your heart to do it."

"I could, — I can. So thou wilt not drink with me?"

"Do you know what you ask?" said Sibyl. "I am a being that sprung up, like this flower, out of a grave; or, at least, I took root in a grave, and, growing there, have twined about your life, until you cannot possibly escape from me. Ah, Septimius! you know me not. You know not what is in my heart towards you. Do you remember this broken miniature? would you wish to see the features that were destroyed when that bullet passed? Then look at mine!"

"Sibyl! what do you tell me? Was it you — were they your features — which that young soldier-kissed as he lay dying?"

"They were," said Sibyl. "I loved him,

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

and gave him that miniature, and the face they represented. I had given him all, and you slew him."

"Then you hate me," whispered Septimius.

"Do you call it hatred?" asked Sibyl, smiling. "Have I not aided you, thought with you, encouraged you, heard all your wild ravings when you dared to tell no one else? kept up your hopes; suggested; helped you with my legendary lore to useful hints; helped you, also, in other ways, which you do not suspect? And now you ask me if I hate you. Does this look like it?"

"No," said Septimius. "And yet, since first I knew you, there has been something whispering me of harm, as if I sat near some mischief. There is in me the wild, natural blood of the Indian, the instinctive, the animal nature, which has ways of warning that civilized life polishes away and cuts out; and so, Sibyl, never did I approach you, but there were reluctances, drawings back, and, at the same time, a strong impulse to come closest to you; and to that I yielded. But why, then, knowing that in this grave lay the man you loved, laid there by my hand, — why did you aid me in an object which you must have seen was the breath of my life?"

"Ah, my friend, — my enemy, if you will have it so, — are you yet to learn that the wish

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

of a man's inmost heart is oftenest that by which he is ruined and made miserable? But listen to me, Septimius. No matter for my earlier life; there is no reason why I should tell you the story, and confess to you its weakness, its shame. It may be, I had more cause to hate the tenant of that grave, than to hate you who unconsciously avenged my cause; nevertheless, I came here in hatred, and desire of revenge, meaning to lie in wait, and turn your dearest desire against you, to eat into your life, and distil poison into it, I sitting on this grave, and drawing fresh hatred from it; and at last, in the hour of your triumph, I meant to make the triumph mine."

"Is this still so?" asked Septimius, with pale lips; "or did your fell purpose change?"

"Septimius, I am weak, — a weak, weak girl, — only a girl, Septimius; only eighteen yet!" exclaimed Sibyl. "It is young, is it not? I might be forgiven much. You know not how bitter my purpose was to you. But look, Septimius, — could it be worse than this? Hush, be still! Do not stir!"

She lifted the beautiful goblet from the table, put it to her lips, and drank a deep draught from it; then, smiling mockingly, she held it towards him.

"See; I have made myself immortal before you. Will you drink?"

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

He eagerly held out his hand to receive the goblet, but Sibyl, holding it beyond his reach a moment, deliberately let it fall upon the hearth, where it shattered into fragments, and the bright, cold water of immortality was all spilt, shedding its strange fragrance around.

"Sibyl, what have you done?" cried Septimius, in rage and horror.

"Be quiet! See what sort of immortality I win by it, — then, if you like, distil your drink of eternity again, and quaff it."

"It is too late, Sibyl; it was a happiness that may never come again in a lifetime. I shall perish as a dog does. It is too late!"

"Septimius," said Sibyl, who looked strangely beautiful, as if the drink, giving her immortal life, had likewise the potency to give immortal beauty answering to it, "listen to me. You have not learned all the secrets that lay in those old legends, about which we have talked so much. There were two recipes, discovered or learned by the art of the studious old Gaspar Felton. One was said to be that secret of immortal life which so many old sages sought for, and which some were said to have found; though, if that were the case, it is strange some of them have not lived till our day. Its essence lay in a certain rare flower, which, mingled properly with other ingredients of great potency in themselves, though still lacking the crowning virtue till the

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

flower was supplied, produced the drink of immortality."

"Yes, and I had the flower, which I found in a grave," said Septimius, "and distilled the drink which you have spilt."

"You had a flower, or what you called a flower," said the girl. "But, Septimius, there was yet another drink, in which the same potent ingredients were used ; all but the last. In this, instead of the beautiful flower, was mingled the semblance of a flower, but really a baneful growth out of a grave. This I sowed there, and it converted the drink into a poison, famous in old science, — a poison which the Borgias used, and Mary de Medicis, — and which has brought to death many a famous person, when it was desirable to his enemies. This is the drink I helped you to distil. It brings on death with pleasant and delightful thrills of the nerves. O Septimius, Septimius, it is worth while to die, to be so blest, so exhilarated as I am now."

"Good God, Sibyl, is this possible?"

"Even so, Septimius. I was helped by that old physician, Doctor Portsoaken, who, with some private purpose of his own, taught me what to do ; for he was skilled in all the mysteries of those old physicians, and knew that their poisons at least were efficacious, whatever their drinks of immortality might be. But the end has not turned out as I meant. A girl's fancy is so shift-

“What have you done?”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

ing, Septimius. I thought I loved that youth in the grave yonder ; but it was you I loved, — and I am dying. Forgive me for my evil purposes, for I am dying.”

“ Why hast thou spilt the drink ? ” said Septimius, bending his dark brows upon her, and frowning over her. “ We might have died together.”

“ No, live, Septimius,” said the girl, whose face appeared to grow bright and joyous, as if the drink of death exhilarated her like an intoxicating fluid. “ I would not let you have it, not one drop. ‘ But to think,’ ” and here she laughed, “ what a penance, — what months of wearisome labor thou hast had, — and what thoughts, what dreams, and how I laughed in my sleeve at them all the time ! Ha, ha, ha ! Then thou didst plan out future ages, and talk poetry and prose to me. Did I not take it very demurely, and answer thee in the same style ? and so thou didst love me, and kindly didst wish to take me with thee in thy immortality. O Septimius, I should have liked it well ! Yes, latterly, only, I knew how the case stood. O, how I surrounded thee with dreams, and instead of giving thee immortal life, so kneaded up the little life allotted thee with dreams and vapping stuff, that thou didst not really live even that. Ah, it was a pleasant pastime, and pleasant is now the end of it. Kiss me, thou poor Septimius, one kiss ! ”

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

[She gives the ridiculous aspect to his scheme, in an airy way.]

But as Septimius, who seemed stunned, instinctively bent forward to obey her, she drew back. "No, there shall be no kiss! There may a little poison linger on my lips. Farewell! Dost thou mean still to seek for thy liquor of immortality? — ah, ah! It was a good jest. We will laugh at it when we meet in the other world."

And here poor Sibyl Dacy's laugh grew fainter, and dying away, she seemed to die with it; for there she was, with that mirthful, half-malign expression still on her face, but motionless; so that however long Septimius's life was likely to be, whether a few years or many centuries, he would still have her image in his memory so. And here she lay among his broken hopes, now shattered as completely as the goblet which held his draught, and as incapable of being formed again.

The next day, as Septimius did not appear, there was research for him on the part of Doctor Portsoaken. His room was found empty, the bed untouched. Then they sought him on his favorite hilltop; but neither was he found there, although something was found that added to the wonder and alarm of his disappearance. It was the cold form of Sibyl Dacy, which was

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

extended on the hillock so often mentioned, with her arms thrown over it; but, looking in the dead face, the beholders were astonished to see a certain malign and mirthful expression, as if some airy part had been played out, — some surprise, some practical joke of a peculiarly airy kind had burst with fairy shoots of fire among the company.

“Ah, she is dead! Poor Sibyl Dacy!” exclaimed Doctor Portsoaken. “Her scheme, then, has turned out amiss.”

This exclamation seemed to imply some knowledge of the mystery; and it so impressed the auditors, among whom was Robert Hagburn, that they thought it not inexpedient to have an investigation; so the learned doctor was not uncivilly taken into custody and examined. Several interesting particulars, some of which throw a certain degree of light on our narrative, were discovered. For instance, that Sibyl Dacy, who was a niece of the doctor, had been beguiled from her home and led over the sea by Cyril Norton, and that the doctor, arriving in Boston with another regiment, had found her there, after her lover's death. Here there was some discrepancy or darkness in the doctor's narrative. He appeared to have consented to, or instigated (for it was not quite evident how far his concurrence had gone), this poor girl's scheme of going and brooding over

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

her lover's grave, and living in close contiguity with the man who had slain him. The doctor had not much to say for himself on this point ; but there was found reason to believe that he was acting in the interest of some English claimant of a great estate that was left without an apparent heir by the death of Cyril Norton, and there was even a suspicion that he, with his fantastic science and antiquated empiricism, had been at the bottom of the scheme of poisoning, which was so strangely intertwined with Septimius's notion, in which he went so nearly crazed, of a drink of immortality. It was observable, however, that the doctor—such a humbug in scientific matters, that he had perhaps bewilder^d himself—seemed to have a sort of faith in the efficacy of the recipe which had so strangely come to light, provided the true flower could be discovered ; but that flower, according to Doctor Portsoaken, had not been seen on earth for many centuries, and was banished probably forever. The flower, or fungus, which Septimius had mistaken for it, was a sort of earthly or devilish counterpart of it, and was greatly in request among the old poisoners for its admirable uses in their art. In fine, no tangible evidence being found against the worthy doctor, he was permitted to depart, and disappeared from the neighborhood, to the scandal of many people, unchanged ; leaving behind him

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

few available effects beyond the web and empty skin of an enormous spider.

As to Septimius, he returned no more to his cottage by the wayside, and none undertook to tell what had become of him ; crushed and annihilated, as it were, by the failure of his magnificent and most absurd dreams. Rumors there have been, however, at various times, that there had appeared an American claimant, who had made out his right to the great estate of Smithell's Hall, and had dwelt there, and left posterity, and that in the subsequent generation an ancient baronial title had been revived in favor of the son and heir of the American. Whether this was our Septimius, I cannot tell ; but I should be rather sorry to believe that after such splendid schemes as he had entertained, he should have been content to settle down into the fat substance and reality of English life, and die in his due time, and be buried like any other man.

A few years ago, while in England, I visited Smithell's Hall, and was entertained there, not knowing at the time that I could claim its owner as my countryman by descent ; though, as I now remember, I was struck by the thin, sallow, American cast of his face, and the lithe slenderness of his figure, and seem now (but this may be my fancy) to recollect a certain Indian glitter of the eye and cast of feature.

SEPTIMIUS FELTON

As for the Bloody Footstep, I saw it with my own eyes, and will venture to suggest that it was a mere natural reddish stain in the stone, converted by superstition into a Bloody Footstep.

APPENDIX

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

OUTLINES OF AN ENGLISH ROMANCE

I

APRIL 1, 1858, *Thursday*. — He had now been travelling long in those rich portions of England where he would most have wished to find the object of his pursuit ; and many had been the scenes which he would willingly have identified with that mentioned in the ancient, time-yellowed record which he bore about with him. It is to be observed that, undertaken at first half as the amusement, the unreal object, of a grown man's playday, it had become more and more real to him with every step of the way that he followed it up ; along those green English lanes it seemed as if everything would bring him close to the mansion that he sought ; every morning he went on with renewed hopes, nor did the evening, though it brought with it no success, bring with it the gloom and heaviness of a real disappointment. In all his life, including its earliest and happiest days, he had never known such a spring and zest as now filled his veins, and gave lightsomeness to his limbs ; this spirit gave to the beautiful country which he trod a still richer

APPENDIX

beauty than it had ever borne, and he sought his ancient home as if he had found his way into Paradise and were there endeavoring to trace out the sight [site] of Eve's bridal bower, the birthplace of the human race and its glorious possibilities of happiness and high performance.

In these sweet and delightful moods of mind, varying from one dream to another, he loved indeed the solitude of his way ; but likewise he loved the facility which his pursuit afforded him, of coming in contact with many varieties of men, and he took advantage of this facility to an extent which it was not usually his impulse to do. But now he came forth from all reserves, and offered himself to whomever the chances of the way offered to him, with a ready sensibility that made its way through every barrier that even English exclusiveness, in whatever rank of life, could set up. The plastic character of Middleton was perhaps a variety of American nature only presenting itself under an individual form ; he could throw off the man of our day, and put on a ruder nature, but then it was with a certain fineness, that made this only [a] distinction between it and the central truth. He found less variety of form in the English character than he had been accustomed to see at home ; but perhaps this was in consequence of the external nature of his acquaintance with it ; for the view of one well accustomed to a people, and of a stranger to them, differs in this — that the latter sees the homogeneity, the one universal character, the groundwork of the whole, while the former sees a thousand little differences, which distinguish the individual men apart, to such a degree that they seem hardly to have any resemblance among themselves.

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

But just at the period of his journey when we take him up, Middleton had been for two or three days the companion of an old man who interested him more than most of his wayside companions ; the more especially as he seemed to be wandering without an object, or with such a dreamy object as that which led Middleton's own steps onward. He was a plain old man enough, but with a pale, strong-featured face and white hair, a certain picturesqueness and venerableness, which Middleton fancied might have befitted a richer garb than he now wore. In much of their conversation, too, he was sensible that, though the stranger betrayed no acquaintance with literature, nor seemed to have conversed with cultivated minds, yet the results of such acquaintance and converse were here. Middleton was inclined to think him, however, an old man, one of those itinerants, such as Wordsworth represented in the *Excursion*, who smooth themselves by the attrition of the world and gain a knowledge equivalent to or better than that of books from the actual intellect of man awake and active around them.

Often, during the short period since their companionship originated, Middleton had felt impelled to disclose to the old man the object of his journey, and the wild tale by which, after two hundred years, he had been blown as it were across the ocean, and drawn onward to commence this search. The old man's ordinary conversation was of a nature to draw forth such a confidence as this ; frequently turning on the traditions of the wayside ; the reminiscences that lingered on the battlefields of the Roses, or of the Parliament, like flowers nurtured by the blood of the slain, and pro-

APPENDIX

longing their race through the centuries for the wayfarer to pluck them ; or the family histories of the castles, manor houses, and seats which, of various epochs, had their park gates along the roadside and would be seen with dark gray towers or ancient gables, or more modern forms of architecture, rising up among clouds of ancient oaks. Middleton watched earnestly to see if, in any of these tales, there were circumstances resembling those striking and singular ones which he had borne so long in his memory, and on which he was now acting in so strange a manner ; but [though] there was a good deal of variety of incident in them, there never was any combination of incidents having the peculiarity of this.

“ I suppose,” said he to the old man, “ the settlers in my country may have carried away with them traditions long since forgotten in this country, but which might have an interest and connection, and might even piece out the broken relics of family history, which have remained perhaps a mystery for hundreds of years. I can conceive, even, that this might be of importance in settling the heirships of estates ; but which now, only the two insulated parts of the story being known, remain a riddle, although the solution of it is actually in the world, if only these two parts could be united across the sea, like the wires of an electric telegraph.”

“ It is an impressive idea,” said the old man. “ Do you know any such tradition as you have hinted at ? ”

April 13th. — Middleton could not but wonder at the singular chance that had established him in such a place, and in such society, so strangely adapted

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

to the purposes with which he had been wandering through England. He had come hither, hoping as it were to find the past still alive and in action; and here it was so in this one only spot, and these few persons into the midst of whom he had suddenly been cast. With these reflections he looked forth from his window into the old-fashioned garden, and at the stone sundial, which had numbered all the hours — all the daylight and serene ones, at least — since his mysterious ancestor left the country. And [is] this, then, he thought to himself, the establishment of which some rumor had been preserved? Was it here that the secret had its hiding place in the old coffer, in the cupboard, in the secret chamber, or whatever was indicated by the apparently idle words of the document which he had preserved? He still smiled at the idea, but it was with a pleasant, mysterious sense that his life had at last got out of the dusty real, and that strangeness had mixed itself up with his daily experience.

With such feelings he prepared himself to go down to dinner with his host. He found him alone at table, which was placed in a dark old room modernized with every English comfort and the pleasant spectacle of a table set with the whitest of napery and the brightest of glass and china. The friendly old gentleman, as he had found him from the first, became doubly and trebly so in that position which brings out whatever warmth of heart an Englishman has, and gives it to him if he has none. The impressionable and sympathetic character of Middleton answered to the kindness of his host; and by the time the meal was concluded, the two were conversing with almost as much

APPENDIX

zest and friendship as if they were similar in age, even fellow countrymen, and had known one another all their lifetime. Middleton's secret, it may be supposed, came often to the tip of his tongue; but still he kept it within, from a natural repugnance to bring out the one romance of his life. The talk, however, necessarily ran much upon topics among which this one would have come in without any extra attempt to introduce it.

"This decay of old families," said the Master, "is much greater than would appear on the surface of things. We have such a reluctance to part with them, that we are content to see them continued by any fiction, through any indirections, rather than to dispense with old names. In your country, I suppose, there is no such reluctance; you are willing that one generation should blot out all that preceded it, and be itself the newest and only age of the world."

"Not quite so," answered Middleton; "at any rate, if there be such a feeling in the people at large, I doubt whether, even in England, those who fancy themselves possessed of claims to birth, cherish them more as a treasure than we do. It is, of course, a thousand times more difficult for us to keep alive a name amid a thousand difficulties sedulously thrown around it by our institutions, than for you to do, where your institutions are anxiously calculated to promote the contrary purpose. It has occasionally struck me, however, that the ancient lineage might often be found in America, for a family which has been compelled to prolong itself here through the female line, and through alien stocks."

"Indeed, my young friend," said the Master, "if

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

that be the case, I should like to [speak?] further with you upon it; for, I can assure you, there are sometimes vicissitudes in old families that make me grieve to think that a man cannot be made for the occasion."

All this while, the young lady at table had remained almost silent; and Middleton had only occasionally been reminded of her by the necessity of performing some of those offices which put people at table under a Christian necessity of recognizing one another. He was, to say the truth, somewhat interested in her, yet not strongly attracted by the neutral tint of her dress, and the neutral character of her manners. She did not seem to be handsome, although, with her face full before him, he had not quite made up his mind on this point.

April 14th. — So here was Middleton, now at length seeing indistinctly a thread, to which the thread that he had so long held in his hand — the hereditary thread that ancestor after ancestor had handed down — might seem ready to join on. He felt as if they were the two points of an electric chain, which being joined, an instantaneous effect must follow. Earnestly, as he would have looked forward to this moment (had he in sober reason ever put any real weight on the fantasy in pursuit of which he had wandered so far) he now, that it actually appeared to be realizing itself, paused with a vague sensation of alarm. The mystery was evidently one of sorrow, if not of crime, and he felt as if that sorrow and crime might not have been annihilated even by being buried out of human sight and remembrance so long. He remembered to

APPENDIX

have heard or read, how that once an old pit had been dug open, in which were found the remains of persons that, as the shuddering bystanders traditionally remembered, had died of an ancient pestilence; and out of that old grave had come a new plague, that slew the far-off progeny of those who had first died by it. Might not some fatal treasure like this, in a moral view, be brought to light by the secret into which he had so strangely been drawn? Such were the fantasies with which he awaited the return of Alice, whose light footsteps sounded afar along the passages of the old mansion; and then all was silent.

At length he heard the sound, a great way off, as he concluded, of her returning footstep, approaching from chamber to chamber, and along the staircases, closing the doors behind her. At first, he paid no great attention to the character of these sounds, but as they drew nearer, he became aware that the footstep was unlike those of Alice; indeed, as unlike as could be, very regular, slow, yet not firm, so that it seemed to be that of an aged person, sauntering listlessly through the rooms. We have often alluded to Middleton's sensitiveness, and the quick vibrations of his sympathies; and there was something in this slow approach that produced a strange feeling within him; so that he stood breathlessly, looking towards the door by which these slow footsteps were to enter. At last, there appeared in the doorway a venerable figure, clad in a rich, faded dressing gown, and standing on the threshold looked fixedly at Middleton, at the same time holding up a light in his left hand. In his right was some object that Middleton did not distinctly see.

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

But he knew the figure, and recognized the face. It was the old man, his long since companion on the journey hitherward.

"So," said the old man, smiling gravely, "you have thought fit, at last, to accept the hospitality which I offered you so long ago. It might have been better for both of us — for all parties — if you had accepted it then !"

"You here !" exclaimed Middleton. "And what can be your connection with all the error and trouble, and involuntary wrong, through which I have wandered since our last meeting ? And is it possible that you even then held the clue which I was seeking ?"

"No, — no," replied Rothermel. "I was not conscious, at least, of so doing. And yet had we two sat down there by the wayside, or on that English stile, which attracted your attention so much ; had we sat down there and thrown forth each his own dream, each his own knowledge, it would have saved much that we must now forever regret. Are you even now ready to confide wholly in me ?"

"Alas," said Middleton, with a darkening brow, "there are many reasons, at this moment, which did not exist then, to incline me to hold my peace. And why has not Alice returned ? — and what is your connection with her ?"

"Let her answer for herself," said Rothermel ; and he called her, shouting through the silent house as if she were at the furthest chamber, and he were in instant need : "Alice ! — Alice ! — Alice ! — here is one who would know what is the link between a maiden and her father !"

APPENDIX

Amid the strange uproar which he made Alice came flying back, not in alarm but only in haste, and put her hand within his own. "Hush, father," said she. "It is not time."

Here is an abstract of the plot of this story. The Middleton who emigrated to America, more than two hundred years ago, had been a dark and moody man ; he came with a beautiful though not young woman for his wife, and left a family behind him. In this family a certain heirloom had been preserved, and with it a tradition that grew wilder and stranger with the passing generations. The tradition had lost, if it ever had, some of its connecting links ; but it referred to a murder, to the expulsion of a brother from the hereditary house, in some strange way, and to a Bloody Footstep which he had left impressed into the threshold, as he turned about to make a last remonstrance. It was rumored, however, or vaguely understood, that the expelled brother was not altogether an innocent man ; but that there had been wrong done, as well as crime committed, insomuch that his reasons were strong that led him, subsequently, to imbibe the most gloomy religious views, and to bury himself in the Western wilderness. These reasons he had never fully imparted to his family ; but had necessarily made allusions to them, which had been treasured up and doubtless enlarged upon. At last, one descendant of the family determines to go to England, with the purpose of searching out whatever ground there may be for these traditions, carrying with him certain ancient documents, and other relics ; and goes about the country, half in earnest, and

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

half in sport of fancy, in quest of the old family mansion. He makes singular discoveries, all of which bring the book to an end unexpected by everybody, and not satisfactory to the natural yearnings of novel-readers. In the traditions that he brought over, there was a key to some family secrets that were still unsolved, and that controlled the descent of estates and titles. His influence upon these matters involves [him] in divers strange and perilous adventures ; and at last it turns out that he himself is the rightful heir to the titles and estate, that had passed into another name within the last half-century. But he respects both, feeling that it is better to make a virgin soil than to try to make the old name grow in a soil that had been darkened with so much blood and misfortune as this.

April 27th, Tuesday. — It was with a delightful feeling of release from ordinary rules, that Middleton found himself brought into this connection with Alice ; and he only hoped that this playday of his life might last long enough to rest him from all that he had suffered. In the enjoyment of his position he almost forgot the pursuit that occupied him, nor might he have remembered for a long space if, one evening, Alice herself had not alluded to it. “You are wasting precious days,” she suddenly said. “Why do not you renew your quest ?”

“To what do you allude ?” said Middleton, in surprise. “What object do you suppose me to have ?”

Alice smiled ; nay, laughed outright. “You suppose yourself to be a perfect mystery, no doubt,” she replied. “But do not I know you — have not I

APPENDIX

known you long — as the holder of the talisman, the owner of the mysterious cabinet that contains the blood-stained secret ? ”

“ Nay, Alice, this is certainly a strange coincidence, that you should know even thus much of a foolish secret that makes me employ this little holiday time, which I have stolen out of a weary life, in a wild-geese chase. But, believe me, you allude to matters that are more a mystery to me than my affairs appear to be to you. Will you explain what you would suggest by this badinage ? ”

Alice shook her head. “ You have no claim to know what I know, even if it would be any addition to your own knowledge. I shall not, and must not enlighten you. You must burrow for the secret with your own tools, in your own manner, and in a place of your own choosing. I am bound not to assist you.”

“ Alice, this is wilful, wayward, unjust,” cried Middleton, with a flushed cheek. “ I have not told you — yet you know well — the deep and real importance which this subject has for me. We have been together as friends, yet, the instant when there comes up an occasion when the slightest friendly feeling would induce you to do me a good office, you assume this altered tone.”

“ My tone is not in the least altered in respect to you,” said Alice. “ All along, as you know, I have reserved myself on this very point ; it being, I candidly tell you, impossible for me to act in your interest in the matter alluded to. If you choose to consider this unfriendly, as being less than the terms on which you conceive us to have stood give you a right to demand

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

of me — you must resent it as you please. I shall not the less retain for you the regard due to one who has certainly befriended me in very untoward circumstances.”

This conversation confirmed the previous idea of Middleton, that some mystery of a peculiarly dark and evil character was connected with the family secret with which he was himself entangled ; but it perplexed him to imagine in what way this, after the lapse of so many years, should continue to be a matter of real importance at the present day. All the actors in the original guilt — if guilt it were — must have been long ago in their graves ; some in the churchyard of the village, with those moss-grown letters embossing their names ; some in the church itself, with mural tablets recording their names over the family pew, and one, it might be, far over the sea, where his grave was first made under the forest leaves, though now a city had grown up around it. Yet here was he, the remote descendant of that family, setting his foot at last in the country, and as secretly as might be ; and all at once his mere presence seemed to revive the buried secret, almost to awake the dead who partook of that secret and had acted it. There was a vibration from the other world, continued and prolonged into this, the instant that he stepped upon the mysterious and haunted ground.

He knew not in what way to proceed. He could not but feel that there was something not exactly within the limits of propriety in being here, disguised — at least, not known in his true character — prying into the secrets of a proud and secluded Englishman.

APPENDIX

But then, as he said to himself on his own side of the question, the secret belonged to himself by exactly as ancient a tenure and by precisely as strong a claim, as to the Englishman. His rights here were just as powerful and well founded as those of his ancestor had been, nearly three centuries ago; and here the same feeling came over him that he was that very personage, returned after all these ages, to see if his foot would fit this bloody footstep left of old upon the threshold. The result of all his cogitation was, as the reader will have foreseen, that he decided to continue his researches, and, his proceedings being pretty defensible, let the result take care of itself.

For this purpose he went next day to the hospital, and ringing at the Master's door, was ushered into the old-fashioned, comfortable library, where he had spent that well-remembered evening which threw the first ray of light on the pursuit that now seemed developing into such strange and unexpected consequences. Being admitted, he was desired by the domestic to wait, as his Reverence was at that moment engaged with a gentleman on business. Glancing through the ivy that mantled over the window, Middleton saw that this interview was taking place in the garden, where the Master and his visitor were walking to and fro in the avenue of box, discussing some matter, as it seemed to him, with considerable earnestness on both sides. He observed, too, that there was warmth, passion, a disturbed feeling on the stranger's part; while, on that of the Master, it was a calm, serious, earnest representation of whatever view he was endeavoring to impress on the other. At last, the interview appeared

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

to come toward a climax, the Master addressing some words to his guest, still with undisturbed calmness, to which the latter replied by a violent and even fierce gesture, as it should seem of menace, not towards the Master, but some unknown party; and then hastily turning, he left the garden and was soon heard riding away. The Master looked after him awhile, and then, shaking his white head, returned into the house and soon entered the parlor.

He looked somewhat surprised, and, as it struck Middleton, a little startled, at finding him there; yet he welcomed him with all his former cordiality — indeed, with a friendship that thoroughly warmed Middleton's heart even to its coldest corner.

“This is strange!” said the old gentleman. “Do you remember our conversation on that evening when I first had the unlooked-for pleasure of receiving you as a guest into my house? At that time I spoke to you of a strange family story, of which there was no dénouement, such as a novel-writer would desire, and which had remained in that unfinished posture for more than two hundred years! Well; perhaps it will gratify you to know that there seems a prospect of that wanting termination being supplied!”

“Indeed!” said Middleton.

“Yes,” replied the Master. “A gentleman has just parted with me who was indeed the representative of the family concerned in the story. He is the descendant of a younger son of that family, to whom the estate devolved about a century ago, although at that time there was search for the heirs of the elder son, who had disappeared after the bloody incident which I

APPENDIX

related to you. Now, singular as it may appear, at this late day, a person claiming to be the descendant and heir of that eldest son has appeared, and, if I may credit my friend's account, is disposed not only to claim the estate, but the dormant title which Eldredge himself has been so long preparing to claim for himself. Singularly enough, too, the heir is an American."

May 2d, Sunday. — "I believe," said Middleton, "that many English secrets might find their solution in America, if the two threads of a story could be brought together, disjoined as they have been by time and the ocean. But are you at liberty to tell me the nature of the incidents to which you allude?"

"I do not see any reason to the contrary," answered the Master; "for the story has already come in an imperfect way before the public, and the full and authentic particulars are likely soon to follow. It seems that the younger brother was ejected from the house on account of a love affair; the elder having married a young woman with whom the younger was in love, and, it is said, the wife disappeared on the bridal night, and was never heard of more. The elder brother remained single during the rest of his life; and dying childless, and there being still no news of the second brother, the inheritance and representation of the family devolved upon the third brother and his posterity. This branch of the family has ever since remained in possession; and latterly the representation has become of more importance, on account of a claim to an old title, which, by the failure of another branch of this ancient family, has devolved upon the branch here settled. Now, just at this juncture, comes another heir

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

from America, pretending that he is the descendant of a marriage between the second son, supposed to have been murdered on the threshold of the manor house, and the missing bride! Is it not a singular story?"

"It would seem to require very strong evidence to prove it," said Middleton. "And methinks a Republican should care little for the title, however he might value the estate."

"Both — both," said the Master, smiling, "would be equally attractive to your countryman. But there are further curious particulars in connection with this claim. You must know, they are a family of singular characteristics, humorists, sometimes developing their queer traits into something like insanity; though oftener, I must say, spending stupid hereditary lives here on their estates, rusting out and dying without leaving any biography whatever about them. And yet there has always been one very queer thing about this generally very commonplace family. It is that each father, on his deathbed, has had an interview with his son, at which he has imparted some secret that has evidently had an influence on the character and after life of the son, making him ever after a discontented man, aspiring for something he has never been able to find. Now the American, I am told, pretends that he has the clue which has always been needed to make the secret available; the key whereby the lock may be opened; the something that the lost son of the family carried away with him, and by which through these centuries he has impeded the progress of the race. And, wild as the story seems, he does certainly seem to bring something that looks very like the proof of what he says."

APPENDIX

“ And what are those proofs ? ” inquired Middleton, wonder-stricken at the strange reduplication of his own position and pursuits.

“ In the first place,” said the Master, “ the English marriage certificate by a clergyman of that day in London, after publication of the banns, with a reference to the register of the parish church where the marriage is recorded. Then, a certified genealogy of the family in New England, where such matters can be ascertained from town and church records, with at least as much certainty, it would appear, as in this country. He has likewise a manuscript in his ancestor’s autograph, containing a brief account of the events which banished him from his own country ; the circumstances which favored the idea that he had been slain, and which he himself was willing should be received as a belief ; the fortune that led him to America, where he wished to found a new race wholly disconnected with the past ; and this manuscript he sealed up, with directions that it should not be opened till two hundred years after his death, by which time, as it was probable to conjecture, it would matter little to any mortal whether the story was told or not. A whole generation has passed since the time when the paper was at last unsealed and read, so long it had no operation ; yet now, at last, here comes the American, to disturb the succession of an ancient family ! ”

“ There is something very strange in all this,” said Middleton.

And indeed there was something stranger in his view of the matter than he had yet communicated to the Master. For, taking into consideration the relation

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

in which he found himself with the present recognized representative of the family, the thought struck him that his coming hither had dug up, as it were, a buried secret that immediately assumed life and activity the moment that it was above ground again. For seven generations the family had vegetated in the quietude of English country gentility, doing nothing to make itself known, passing from the cradle to the tomb amid the same old woods that had waved over it before his ancestor had impressed the bloody footstep; and yet the instant that he came back, an influence seemed to be at work that was likely to renew the old history of the family. He questioned with himself whether it were not better to leave all as it was; to withdraw himself into the secrecy from which he had but half emerged, and leave the family to keep on, to the end of time perhaps, in its rusty innocence, rather than to interfere with his wild American character to disturb it. The smell of that dark crime — that brotherly hatred and attempted murder — seemed to breathe out of the ground as he dug it up. Was it not better that it should remain forever buried, for what to him was this old English title — what this estate, so far from his own native land, located amidst feelings and manners which would never be his own? It was late, to be sure — yet not too late for him to turn back: the vibration, the fear, which his footsteps had caused, would subside into peace! Meditating in this way, he took a hasty leave of the kind old Master, promising to see him again at an early opportunity. By chance, or however it was, his footsteps turned to the woods of — Chace, and there he wandered through

APPENDIX

its glades, deep in thought, yet always with a strange sense that he was treading on the soil where his ancestors had trodden, and where he himself had best right of all men to be. It was just in this state of feeling that he found his course arrested by a hand upon his shoulder.

“What business have you here?” was the question sounded in his ear; and, starting, he found himself in the grasp, as his blood tingled to know, of a gentleman in a shooting dress, who looked at him with a wrathful brow. “Are you a poacher, or what?”

Be the case what it might, Middleton’s blood boiled at the grasp of that hand, as it never before had done in the course of his impulsive life. He shook himself free, and stood fiercely before his antagonist, confronting him with his uplifted stick, while the other, likewise, appeared to be shaken by a strange wrath.

“Fellow,” muttered he — “Yankee blackguard! — impostor — take yourself off these grounds. Quick, or it will be the worse for you!”

Middleton restrained himself. “Mr. Eldredge,” said he, “for I believe I speak to the man who calls himself owner of this land on which we stand, — Mr. Eldredge, you are acting under a strange misapprehension of my character. I have come hither with no sinister purpose, and am entitled, at the hands of a gentleman, to the consideration of an honorable antagonist, even if you deem me one at all. And perhaps, if you think upon the blue chamber and the ebony cabinet, and the secret connected with it” —

“Villain, no more!” said Eldredge; and utterly mad with rage, he presented his gun at Middleton; but

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

even at the moment of doing so, he partly restrained himself, so far as, instead of shooting him, to raise the butt of his gun, and strike a blow at him. It came down heavily on Middleton's shoulder, though aimed at his head; and the blow was terribly avenged, even by itself, for the jar caused the hammer to come down; the gun went off, sending the bullet downwards through the heart of the unfortunate man, who fell dead upon the ground. Eldredge¹ stood stupefied, looking at the catastrophe which had so suddenly occurred.

May 3d, Monday. — So here was the secret suddenly made safe in this so terrible way; its keepers reduced from two parties to one interest; the other who alone knew of this age-long mystery and trouble now carrying it into eternity, where a long line of those who partook of the knowledge, in each successive generation, might now be waiting to inquire of him how he had held his trust. He had kept it well, there was no doubt of it; for there he lay dead upon the ground, having betrayed it to no one, though by a method which none could have foreseen, the whole had come into the possession of him who had brought hither but half of it. Middleton looked down in horror upon the form that had just been so full of life and wrathful vigor — and now lay so quietly. Being wholly unconscious of any purpose to bring about the catastrophe, it had not at first struck him that his own position was in any manner affected by the violent death, under such circumstances, of the unfortunate man. But now it suddenly occurred to him, that there had been a train of incidents all calculated to make him the ob-

¹ Evidently a slip of the pen; Middleton being intended.

APPENDIX

ject of suspicion ; and he felt that he could not, under the English administration of law, be suffered to go at large without rendering a strict account of himself and his relations with the deceased. He might, indeed, fly ; he might still remain in the vicinity, and possibly escape notice. But was not the risk too great ? Was it just even to be aware of this event, and not relate fully the manner of it, lest a suspicion of blood-guiltiness should rest upon some innocent head ? But while he was thus cogitating, he heard footsteps approaching along the wood path ; and half impulsively, half on purpose, he stepped aside into the shrubbery, but still where he could see the dead body, and what passed near it.

The footsteps came on, and at the turning of the path, just where Middleton had met Eldredge, the new-comer appeared in sight. It was Hoper, in his usual dress of velveteen, looking now seedy, poverty-stricken, and altogether in ill case, trudging moodily along, with his hat pulled over his brows, so that he did not see the ghastly object before him till his foot absolutely trod upon the dead man's hand. Being thus made aware of the proximity of the corpse, he started back a little, yet evincing such small emotion as did credit to his English reserve ; then uttering a low exclamation, — cautiously low, indeed, — he stood looking at the corpse a moment or two, apparently in deep meditation. He then drew near, bent down, and without evincing any horror at the touch of death in this horrid shape, he opened the dead man's vest, inspected the wound, satisfied himself that life was extinct, and then nodded his head and smiled gravely. He next pro-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

ceeded to examine seriatim the dead man's pockets, turning each of them inside out and taking the contents, where they appeared adapted to his needs: for instance, a silken purse, through the interstices of which some gold was visible; a watch, which however had been injured by the explosion, and had stopt just at the moment — twenty-one minutes past five — when the catastrophe took place. Hoper ascertained, by putting the watch to his ear, that this was the case; then pocketing it, he continued his researches. He likewise secured a notebook, on examining which he found several bank notes, and some other papers. And having done this, the thief stood considering what to do next; nothing better occurring to him, he thrust the pockets back, gave the corpse as nearly as he could the same appearance that it had worn before he found it, and hastened away, leaving the horror there on the wood path.

He had been gone only a few minutes when another step, a light woman's step, [was heard] coming along the pathway, and Alice appeared, having on her usual white mantle, straying along with that fearlessness which characterized her so strangely, and made her seem like one of the denizens of nature. She was singing in a low tone some one of those airs which have become so popular in England, as negro melodies; when suddenly, looking before her, she saw the blood-stained body on the grass, the face looking ghastly upward. Alice pressed her hand upon her heart; it was not her habit to scream, not the habit of that strong, wild, self-dependent nature; and the exclamation which broke from her was not for help, but the voice of her

APPENDIX

heart crying out to herself. For an instant she hesitated, as [if] not knowing what to do ; then approached, and with her white, maiden hand felt the brow of the dead man, tremblingly, but yet firm, and satisfied herself that life had wholly departed. She pressed her hand, that had just touched the dead man's, on her forehead, and gave a moment to thought.

What her decision might have been, we cannot say, for while she stood in this attitude, Middleton stepped from his seclusion, and at the noise of his approach she turned suddenly round, looking more frightened and agitated than at the moment when she had first seen the dead body. She faced Middleton, however, and looked him quietly in the eye. " You see this ! " said she, gazing fixedly at him. " It is not at this moment that you first discover it."

" No," said Middleton frankly. " It is not. I was present at the catastrophe. In one sense, indeed, I was the cause of it ; but, Alice, I need not tell you that I am no murderer."

" A murderer ? — no," said Alice, still looking at him with the same fixed gaze. " But you and this man were at deadly variance. He would have rejoiced at any chance that would have laid you cold and bloody on the earth, as he is now ; nay, he would most eagerly have seized on any fair-looking pretext that would have given him a chance to stretch you there. The world will scarcely believe, when it knows all about your relations with him, that his blood is not on your hand. Indeed," said she, with a strange smile, " I see some of it there now ! "

And, in very truth, so there was ; a broad blood-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

stain that had dried on Middleton's hand. He shuddered at it, but essayed vainly to rub it off.

"You see," said she. "It was foreordained that you should shed this man's blood; foreordained that, by digging into that old pit of pestilence, you should set the contagion loose again. You should have left it buried forever. But now what do you mean to do?"

"To proclaim this catastrophe," replied Middleton. "It is the only honest and manly way. What else can I do?"

"You can and ought to leave him on the wood path, where he has fallen," said Alice, "and go yourself to take advantage of the state of things which Providence has brought about. Enter the old house, the hereditary house, where — now, at least — you alone have a right to tread. Now is the hour. All is within your grasp. Let the wrong of three hundred years be righted, and come back thus to your own, to these hereditary fields, this quiet, long-descended home; to title, to honor."

Yet as the wild maiden spoke thus, there was a sort of mockery in her eyes; on her brow; gleaming through all her face, as if she scorned what she thus pressed upon him, the spoils of the dead man who lay at their feet. Middleton, with his susceptibility, could not [but] be sensible of a wild and strange charm, as well as horror, in the situation; it seemed such a wonder that here, in formal, orderly, well-governed England, so wild a scene as this should have occurred; that they too [two?] should stand here, deciding on the descent of an estate, and the inheritance of a title, holding a court of their own.

APPENDIX

"Come, then," said he, at length. "Let us leave this poor fallen antagonist in his blood, and go whither you will lead me. I will judge for myself. At all events, I will not leave my hereditary home without knowing what my power is."

"Come," responded Alice; and she turned back; but then returned and threw a handkerchief over the dead man's face, which while they spoke had assumed that quiet, ecstatic expression of joy which often is observed to overspread the faces of those who die of gunshot wounds, however fierce the passion in which the spirits took their flight. With this strange, grand, awful joy did the dead man gaze upward into the very eyes and hearts, as it were, of the two that now bent over him. They looked at one another.

"Whence comes this expression?" said Middleton thoughtfully. "Alice, methinks he is reconciled to us now; and that we are members of one reconciled family, all of whom are in heaven but me."

Tuesday, May 4th. — "How strange is this whole situation between you and me," said Middleton, as they went up the winding pathway that led towards the house. "Shall I ever understand it? Do you mean ever to explain it to me? That I should find you here with that old man,¹ so mysterious, apparently

¹ The allusion here is apparently to the old man who proclaims himself Alice's father, in the portion dated April 14th. He figures hereafter as the old Hospitaller, Hammond. The reader must not take this present passage as referring to the death of Eldredge, which has just taken place in the preceding section. The author is now beginning to elaborate the relation of Middleton and Alice. As will be seen, farther on, the death of Eldredge is ignored and abandoned; Eldredge is revived, and the story proceeds in another way. — G. P. L.

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

so poor, yet so powerful ! What [is] his relation to you ? ”

“ A close one,” replied Alice sadly. “ He was my father ! ”

“ Your father ! ” repeated Middleton, starting back. “ It does but heighten the wonder ! Your father ! And yet, by all the tokens that birth and breeding, and habits of thought and native character can show, you are my countrywoman. That wild, free spirit was never born in the breast of an Englishwoman ; that slight frame, that slender beauty, that frail envelopment of a quick, piercing, yet stubborn and patient spirit, — are those the properties of an English maiden ? ”

“ Perhaps not,” replied Alice quietly. “ I am your countrywoman. My father was an American, and one of whom you have heard — and no good, alas ! — for many a year.”

“ And who then was he ? ” asked Middleton.

“ I know not whether you will hate me for telling you,” replied Alice, looking him sadly though firmly in the face. “ There was a man — long years since, in your childhood — whose plotting brain proved the ruin of himself and many another ; a man whose great designs made him a sort of potentate, whose schemes became of national importance, and produced results even upon the history of the country in which he acted. That man was my father ; a man who sought to do great things, and, like many who have had similar aims, disregarded many small rights, strode over them, on his way to effect a gigantic purpose. Among other men, your father was trampled under foot, ruined, done to death, even, by the effects of his ambition.”

APPENDIX

"How is it possible!" exclaimed Middleton. "Was it Wentworth?"

"Even so," said Alice, still with the same sad calmness and not withdrawing her steady eyes from his face. "After his ruin; after the catastrophe that overwhelmed him and hundreds more, he took to flight; guilty, perhaps, but guilty as a fallen conqueror is; guilty to such an extent that he ceased to be a cheat, as a conqueror ceases to be a murderer. He came to England. My father had an original nobility of nature; and his life had not been such as to debase it, but rather such as to cherish and heighten that self-esteem which at least keeps the possessor of it from many meaner vices. He took nothing with him; nothing beyond the bare means of flight, with the world before him, although thousands of gold would not have been missed out of the scattered fragments of ruin that lay around him. He found his way hither, led, as you were, by a desire to reconnect himself with the place whence his family had originated; for he, too, was of a race which had something to do with the ancient story which has now been brought to a close. Arrived here, there were circumstances that chanced to make his talents and habits of business available to this Mr. Eldredge, a man ignorant and indolent, unknowing how to make the best of the property that was in his hands. By degrees, he took the estate into his management, acquiring necessarily a preponderating influence over such a man."

"And you," said Middleton. "Have you been all along in England? For you must have been little more than an infant at the time."

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

"A mere infant," said Alice, "and I remained in our own country under the care of a relative who left me much to my own keeping; much to the influences of that wild culture which the freedom of our country gives to its youth. It is only two years that I have been in England."

"This, then," said Middleton thoughtfully, "accounts for much that has seemed so strange in the events through which we have passed; for the knowledge of my identity and my half-defined purpose which has always glided before me, and thrown so many strange shapes of difficulty in my path. But whence, — whence came that malevolence which your father's conduct has so unmistakably shown? I had done him no injury, though I had suffered much."

"I have often thought," replied Alice, "that my father, though retaining a preternatural strength and acuteness of intellect, was really not altogether sane. And, besides, he had made it his business to keep this estate, and all the complicated advantages of the representation of this old family, secure to the person who was deemed to have inherited them. A succession of ages and generations might be supposed to have blotted out your claims from existence; for it is not just that there should be no term of time which can make security for lack of fact and a few formalities. At all events, he had satisfied himself that his duty was to act as he has done."

"Be it so! I do not seek to throw blame on him," said Middleton. "Besides, Alice, he was your father!"

"Yes," said she, sadly smiling; "let him [have] what protection that thought may give him, even

APPENDIX

though I lose what he may gain. And now here we are at the house. At last, come in ! It is your own ; there is none that can longer forbid you ! ”

They entered the door of the old mansion, now a farmhouse, and there were its old hall, its old chambers, all before them. They ascended the staircase, and stood on the landing place above ; while Middleton had again that feeling that had so often made him dizzy, — that sense of being in one dream and recognizing the scenery and events of a former dream. So overpowering was this feeling, that he laid his hand on the slender arm of Alice, to steady himself ; and she comprehended the emotion that agitated him, and looked into his eyes with a tender sympathy, which she had never before permitted to be visible, — perhaps never before felt. He steadied himself and followed her till they had entered an ancient chamber, but one that was finished with all the comfortable luxury customary to be seen in English homes.

“ Whither have you led me now ? ” inquired Middleton.

“ Look round,” said Alice. “ Is there nothing here that you ought to recognize ? — nothing that you kept the memory of, long ago ? ”

He looked round the room again and again, and at last, in a somewhat shadowy corner, he espied an old cabinet made of ebony and inlaid with pearl ; one of those tall, stately, and elaborate pieces of furniture that are rather articles of architecture than upholstery ; and on which a higher skill, feeling, and genius than now is ever employed on such things, was expended. Alice drew near the stately cabinet and threw wide the doors,

His hand on the slender arm

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

which, like the portals of a palace, stood between two pillars; it all seemed to be unlocked, showing within some beautiful old pictures in the panel of the doors, and a mirror, that opened a long succession of mimic halls, reflection upon reflection, extending to an interminable nowhere.

“And what is this?” said Middleton, — “a cabinet? Why do you draw my attention so strongly to it?”

“Look at it well,” said she. “Do you recognize nothing there? Have you forgotten your description? The stately palace with its architecture, each pillar with its architecture, those pilasters, that frieze; you ought to know them all. Somewhat less than you imagined in size, perhaps; a fairy reality, inches for yards; that is the only difference. And you have the key?”

And there then was that palace, to which tradition, so false at once and true, had given such magnitude and magnificence in the traditions of the Middleton family, around their shifting fireside in America. Looming afar through the mists of time, the little fact had become a gigantic vision. Yes, here it was in miniature, all that he had dreamed of; a palace of four feet high!

“You have the key of this palace,” said Alice; “it has waited — that is, its secret and precious chamber has, for you to open it, these three hundred years. Do you know how to find that secret chamber?”

Middleton, still in that dreamy mood, threw open an inner door of the cabinet, and applying the old-fashioned key at his watch chain to a hole in the mimic pavement

APPENDIX

within, pressed one of the mosaics, and immediately the whole floor of the apartment sank, and revealed a receptacle within. Alice had come forward eagerly, and they both looked into the hiding place, expecting what should be there. It was empty ! They looked into each other's faces with blank astonishment. Everything had been so strangely true, and so strangely false, up to this moment, that they could not comprehend this failure at the last moment. It was the strangest, saddest jest ! It brought Middleton up with such a sudden revulsion that he grew dizzy, and the room swam round him and the cabinet dazzled before his eyes. It had been magnified to a palace ; it had dwindled down to Lilliputian size ; and yet, up till now, it had seemed to contain in its diminutiveness all the riches which he had attributed to its magnitude. This last moment had utterly subverted it ; the whole great structure seemed to vanish.

“ See ; here are the dust and ashes of it,” observed Alice, taking something that was indeed only a pinch of dust out of the secret compartment. “ There is nothing else.”

II

May 5th, Wednesday. — The father of these two sons, an aged man at the time, took much to heart their enmity ; and after the catastrophe, he never held up his head again. He was not told that his son had perished, though such was the belief of the family ; but imbibed the opinion that he had left his home and native land to become a wanderer on the face of the earth,

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

and that some time or other he might return. In this idea he spent the remainder of his days; in this idea he died. It may be that the influence of this idea might be traced in the way in which he spent some of the latter years of his life, and a portion of the wealth which had become of little value in his eyes, since it had caused dissension and bloodshed between the sons of one household. It was a common mode of charity in those days — a common thing for rich men to do — to found an almshouse or a hospital, and endow it, for the support of a certain number of old and destitute men or women, generally such as had some claim of blood upon the founder, or at least were natives of the parish, the district, the county, where he dwelt. The Eldredge Hospital was founded for the benefit of twelve old men, who should have been wanderers upon the face of the earth; men, they should be, of some education, but defeated and hopeless, cast off by the world for misfortune, but not for crime. And this charity had subsisted, on terms varying little or nothing from the original ones, from that day to this; and, at this very time, twelve old men were not wanting, of various countries, of various fortunes, but all ending finally in ruin, who had centred here, to live on the poor pittance that had been assigned to them, three hundred years ago. What a series of chronicles it would have been if each of the beneficiaries of this charity, since its foundation, had left a record of the events which finally led him hither. Middleton often, as he talked with these old men, regretted that he himself had no turn for authorship, so rich a volume might he have compiled from the experience, sometimes sunny and

APPENDIX

triumphant, though always ending in shadow, which he gathered here. They were glad to talk to him, and would have been glad and grateful for any auditor, as they sat on one or another of the stone benches, in the sunshine of the garden ; or at evening, around the great fireside, or within the chimney corner, with their pipes and ale.

There was one old man who attracted much of his attention, by the venerableness of his aspect ; by something dignified, almost haughty and commanding, in his air. Whatever might have been the intentions and expectations of the founder, it certainly had happened in these latter days that there was a difficulty in finding persons of education, of good manners, of evident respectability, to put into the places made vacant by deaths of members ; whether that the paths of life are surer now than they used to be, and that men so arrange their lives as not to be left, in any event, quite without resources as they draw near its close ; at any rate, there was a little tincture of the vagabond running through these twelve quasi gentlemen, — through several of them, at least. But this old man could not well be mistaken ; in his manners, in his tones, in all his natural language and deportment, there was evidence that he had been more than respectable ; and, viewing him, Middleton could not help wondering what statesman had suddenly vanished out of public life and taken refuge here, for his head was of the statesman class, and his demeanor that of one who had exercised influence over large numbers of men. He sometimes endeavored to set on foot a familiar relation with this old man, but there was even a sternness in the manner

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

in which he repelled these advances, that gave little encouragement for their renewal. Nor did it seem that his companions of the Hospital were more in his confidence than Middleton himself. They regarded him with a kind of awe, a shyness, and in most cases with a certain dislike, which denoted an imperfect understanding of him. To say the truth, there was not generally much love lost between any of the members of this family ; they had met with too much disappointment in the world to take kindly, now, to one another or to anything or anybody. I rather suspect that they really had more pleasure in burying one another, when the time came, than in any other office of mutual kindness and brotherly love which it was their part to do ; not out of hardness of heart, but merely from soured temper, and because, when people have met disappointment and have settled down into final unhappiness, with no more gush and spring of good spirits, there is nothing any more to create amiability out of.

So the old people were unamiable and cross to one another, and unamiable and cross to old Hammond, yet always with a certain respect ; and the result seemed to be such as treated the old man well enough. And thus he moved about among them, a mystery ; the histories of the others, in the general outline, were well enough known, and perhaps not very uncommon ; this old man's history was known to none, except, of course, to the trustees of the charity, and to the Master of the Hospital, to whom it had necessarily been revealed, before the beneficiary could be admitted as an inmate. It was judged, by the deportment of the

APPENDIX

Master, that the old man had once held some eminent position in society; for, though bound to treat them all as gentlemen, he was thought to show an especial and solemn courtesy to Hammond.

Yet by the attraction which two strong and cultivated minds inevitably have for one another, there did spring up an acquaintanceship, an intercourse, between Middleton and this old man, which was followed up in many a conversation which they held together on all subjects that were supplied by the news of the day, or the history of the past. Middleton used to make the newspaper the opening for much discussion; and it seemed to him that the talk of his companion had much of the character of that of a retired statesman, on matters which, perhaps, he would look at all the more wisely, because it was impossible he could ever more have a personal agency in them. Their discussions sometimes turned upon the affairs of his own country, and its relations with the rest of the world, especially with England; and Middleton could not help being struck with the accuracy of the old man's knowledge respecting that country, which so few Englishmen know anything about; his shrewd appreciation of the American character,—shrewd and caustic, yet not without a good degree of justice; the sagacity of his remarks on the past, and prophecies of what was likely to happen,—prophecies which, in one instance, were singularly verified, in regard to a complexity which was then arresting the attention of both countries.

“You must have been in the United States,” said he, one day.

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

“Certainly; my remarks imply personal knowledge,” was the reply. “But it was before the days of steam.”

“And not, I should imagine, for a brief visit,” said Middleton. “I only wish the administration of this government had the benefit to-day of your knowledge of my countrymen. It might be better for both of these kindred nations.”

“Not a whit,” said the old man. “England will never understand America; for England never does understand a foreign country; and whatever you may say about kindred, America is as much a foreign country as France itself. These two hundred years of a different climate and circumstances — of life on a broad continent instead of in an island, to say nothing of the endless intermixture of nationalities in every part of the United States, except New England — have created a new and decidedly original type of national character. It is as well for both parties that they should not aim at any very intimate connection. It will never do.”

“I should be sorry to think so,” said Middleton; “they are at all events two noble breeds of men, and ought to appreciate one another. And America has the breadth of idea to do this for England, whether reciprocated or not.”

Thursday, May 6th. — Thus Middleton was established in a singular way among these old men, in one of the surroundings most unlike anything in his own country. So old it was that it seemed to him the freshest and newest thing that he had ever met with. The residence was made infinitely the more interest-

APPENDIX

ing to him by the sense that he was near the place—as all the indications warned him—which he sought, whither his dreams had tended from his childhood; that he could wander each day round the park within which were the old gables of what he believed was his hereditary home. He had never known anything like the dreamy enjoyment of those days; so quiet, such a contrast to the turbulent life from which he had escaped across the sea. And here he set himself, still with that sense of shadowiness in what he saw and in what he did, in making all the researches possible to him, about the neighborhood; visiting every little church that raised its square battlemented Norman tower of gray stone, for several miles round about; making himself acquainted with each little village and hamlet that surrounded these churches, clustering about the graves of those who had dwelt in the same cottages aforetime. He visited all the towns within a dozen miles; and probably there were few of the inhabitants who had so good an acquaintance with the neighborhood as this native American attained within a few weeks after his coming thither.

In course of these excursions he had several times met with a young woman, — a young lady, one might term her, but in fact he was in some doubt what rank she might hold, in England, — who happened to be wandering about the country with a singular freedom. She was always alone, always on foot; he would see her sketching some picturesque old church, some ivied ruin, some fine drooping elm. She was a slight figure, much more so than Englishwomen generally are; and, though healthy of aspect, had not the ruddy complex-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

ion, which he was irreverently inclined to call the coarse tint, that is believed the great charm of English beauty. There was a freedom in her step and whole little womanhood, an elasticity, an irregularity, so to speak, that made her memorable from first sight; and when he had encountered her three or four times, he felt in a certain way acquainted with her. She was very simply dressed, and quite as simple in her deportment; there had been one or two occasions, when they had both smiled at the same thing; soon afterwards a little conversation had taken place between them; and thus, without any introduction, and in a way that somewhat puzzled Middleton himself, they had become acquainted. It was so unusual that a young English girl should be wandering about the country entirely alone — so much less usual that she should speak to a stranger — that Middleton scarcely knew how to account for it, but meanwhile accepted the fact readily and willingly, for in truth he found this mysterious personage a very likely and entertaining companion. There was a strange quality of boldness in her remarks, almost of brusqueness, that he might have expected to find in a young countrywoman of his own, if bred up among the strong-minded, but was astonished to find in a young Englishwoman. Somehow or other she made him think more of home than any other person or thing he met with; and he could not but feel that she was in strange contrast with everything about her. She was no beauty; very piquant; very pleasing; in some points of view and at some moments pretty; always good-humored, but somewhat too self-possessed for Middleton's taste. It struck him that she had talked

APPENDIX

with him as if she had some knowledge of him and of the purposes with which he was there ; not that this was expressed, but only implied by the fact that, on looking back to what had passed, he found many strange coincidences in what she had said with what he was thinking about.

He perplexed himself much with thinking whence this young woman had come, where she belonged, and what might be her history ; when, the next day, he again saw her, not this time rambling on foot, but seated in an open barouche with a young lady. Middleton lifted his hat to her, and she nodded and smiled to him ; and it appeared to Middleton that a conversation ensued about him with the young lady, her companion. Now, what still more interested him was the fact that, on the panel of the barouche were the arms of the family now in possession of the estate of Smithell's ; so that the young lady, his new acquaintance, or the young lady, her seeming friend, one or the other, was the sister of the present owner of that estate. He was inclined to think that his acquaintance could not be the Miss Eldredge, of whose beauty he had heard many tales among the people of the neighborhood. The other young lady, a tall, reserved, fair-haired maiden, answered the description considerably better. He concluded, therefore, that his acquaintance must be a visitor, perhaps a dependent and companion ; though the freedom of her thought, action, and way of life seemed hardly consistent with this idea. However, this slight incident served to give him a sort of connection with the family, and he could but hope that some further chance would introduce him within what he fondly

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

called his hereditary walls. He had come to think of this as a dreamland ; and it seemed even more a dreamland now than before it rendered itself into actual substance, an old house of stone and timber standing within its park, shaded about with its ancestral trees.

But thus, at all events, he was getting himself a little wrought into the network of human life around him, secluded as his position had at first seemed to be, in the farmhouse where he had taken up his lodgings. For, there was the Hospital and its old inhabitants, in whose monotonous existence he soon came to pass for something, with his liveliness of mind, his experience, his good sense, his patience as a listener, his comparative youth even — his power of adapting himself to these stiff and crusty characters, a power learned among other things in his political life, where he had acquired something of the faculty (good or bad as might be) of making himself all things to all men. But though he amused himself with them all, there was in truth but one man among them in whom he really felt much interest ; and that one, we need hardly say, was Hammond. It was not often that he found the old gentleman in a conversable mood ; always courteous, indeed, but generally cool and reserved ; often engaged in his one room, to which Middleton had never yet been admitted, though he had more than once sent in his name, when Hammond was not apparent upon the bench which, by common consent of the Hospital, was appropriated to him.

One day, however, notwithstanding that the old gentleman was confined to his room by indisposition, he ventured to inquire at the door, and, considerably to

APPENDIX

his surprise, was admitted. He found Hammond in his easy-chair, at a table, with writing materials before him: and as Middleton entered, the old gentleman looked at him with a stern, fixed regard, which, however, did not seem to imply any particular displeasure towards this visitor, but rather a severe way of regarding mankind in general. Middleton looked curiously around the small apartment, to see what modification the character of the man had had upon the customary furniture of the Hospital, and how much of individuality he had given to that general type. There was a shelf of books, and a row of them on the mantelpiece; works of political economy, they appeared to be, statistics and things of that sort; very dry reading, with which, however, Middleton's experience as a politician had made him acquainted. Besides these there were a few works on local antiquities, a county history borrowed from the Master's library, in which Hammond appeared to have been lately reading.

"They are delightful reading," observed Middleton, "these old county histories, with their great folio volumes and their minute account of the affairs of families and the genealogies, and descents of estates, bestowing as much blessed space on a few hundred acres as other historians give to a principality. I fear that in my own country we shall never have anything of this kind. Our space is so vast that we shall never come to know and love it, inch by inch, as the English antiquarians do the tracts of country with which they deal; and besides, our land is always likely to lack the interest that belongs to English estates; for where land changes its ownership every few years, it

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

does not become imbued with the personalities of the people who live on it. It is but so much grass ; so much dirt, where a succession of people have dwelt too little to make it really their own. But I have found a pleasure that I had no conception of before, in reading some of the English local histories."

"It is not a usual course of reading for a transitory visitor," said Hammond. "What could induce you to undertake it?"

"Simply the wish so common and natural with Americans," said Middleton, — "the wish to find out something about my kindred, — the local origin of my own family."

"You do not show your wisdom in this," said his visitor. "America had better recognize the fact that it has nothing to do with England, and look upon itself as other nations and people do, as existing on its own hook. I never heard of any people looking back to the country of their remote origin in the way the Anglo-Americans do. For instance, England is made up of many alien races, German, Danish, Norman, and what not : it has received large accessions of population at a later date than the settlement of the United States. Yet these families melt into the great homogeneous mass of Englishmen, and look back no more to any other country. There are in this vicinity many descendants of the French Huguenots ; but they care no more for France than for Timbuctoo, reckoning themselves only Englishmen, as if they were descendants of the aboriginal Britons. Let it be so with you."

"So it might be," replied Middleton, "only that

APPENDIX

our relations with England remain far more numerous than our disconnections, through the bonds of history, of literature, of all that makes up the memories, and much that makes up the present interests of a people. And therefore I must still continue to pore over these old folios, and hunt around these precincts, spending thus the little idle time I am likely to have in a busy life. Possibly finding little to my purpose ; but that is quite a secondary consideration."

"If you choose to tell me precisely what your aims are," said Hammond, "it is possible I might give you some little assistance."

May 7th, Friday. — Middleton was in fact more than half ashamed of the dreams which he had cherished before coming to England, and which since, at times, had been very potent with him, assuming as strong a tinge of reality as those [scenes?] into which he had strayed. He could not prevail with himself to disclose fully to this severe, and, as he thought, cynical old man how strong within him was the sentiment that impelled him to connect himself with the old life of England, to join on the broken thread of ancestry and descent, and feel every link well established. But it seemed to him that he ought not to lose this fair opportunity of gaining some light on the abstruse field of his researches ; and he therefore explained to Hammond that he had reason, from old family traditions, to believe that he brought with him a fragment of a history that, if followed out, might lead to curious results. He told him, in a tone half serious, what he had heard respecting the quarrel of the two brothers, and the Bloody Footstep, the im-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

press of which was said to remain, as a lasting memorial of the tragic termination of that enmity. At this point, Hammond interrupted him. He had indeed, at various points of the narrative, nodded and smiled mysteriously, as if looking into his mind and seeing something there analogous to what he was listening to. He now spoke.

"This is curious," said he. "Did you know that there is a manor house in this neighborhood, the family of which prides itself on having such a blood-stained threshold as you have now described?"

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Middleton, greatly interested. "Where?"

"It is the old manor house of Smithell's," replied Hammond, "one of those old wood and timber [plaster?] mansions, which are among the most ancient specimens of domestic architecture in England. The house has now passed into the female line, and by marriage has been for two or three generations in possession of another family. But the blood of the old inheritors is still in the family. The house itself, or portions of it, are thought to date back quite as far as the Conquest."

"Smithell's?" said Middleton. "Why, I have seen that old house from a distance, and have felt no little interest in its antique aspect. And it has a Bloody Footstep! Would it be possible for a stranger to get an opportunity to inspect it?"

"Unquestionably," said Hammond, — "nothing easier. It is but a moderate distance from here, and if you can moderate your young footsteps, and your American quick walk, to an old man's pace, I would

APPENDIX

go there with you some day. In this languor and ennui of my life, I spend some time in local antiquarianism, and perhaps I might assist you in tracing out how far these traditions of yours may have any connection with reality. It would be curious, would it not, if you had come, after two hundred years, to piece out a story which may have been as much a mystery in England as there in America? "

An engagement was made for a walk to Smithell's the ensuing day; and meanwhile Middleton entered more fully into what he had received from family traditions and what he had thought out for himself on the matter in question.

"Are you aware," asked Hammond, "that there was formerly a title in this family, now in abeyance, and which the heirs have at various times claimed, and are at this moment claiming? Do you know, too,—but you can scarcely know it,—that it has been surmised by some that there is an insecurity in the title to the estate, and has always been; so that the possessors have lived in some apprehension, from time immemorial, that another heir would appear and take from them the fair inheritance? It is a singular coincidence."

"Very strange!" exclaimed Middleton. "No; I was not aware of it; and, to say the truth, I should not altogether like to come forward in the light of a claimant. But this is a dream, surely!"

"I assure you, sir," continued the old man, "that you come here in a very critical moment; and singularly enough there is a perplexity, a difficulty, that has endured for as long a time as when your ancestors emi-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

grated, that is still rampant within the bowels, as I may say, of the family. Of course, it is too like a romance that you should be able to establish any such claim as would have a valid influence on this matter; but still, being here on the spot, it may be worth while, if merely as a matter of amusement, to make some researches into this matter."

"Surely I will," said Middleton, with a smile, which concealed more earnestness than he liked to show; "as to the title, a Republican cannot be supposed to think twice about such a bagatelle. The estate! — that might be a more serious consideration."

They continued to talk on the subject; and Middleton learned that the present possessor of the estates was a gentleman nowise distinguished from hundreds of other English gentlemen; a country squire modified in accordance with the type of to-day, a frank, free, friendly sort of a person enough, who had travelled on the Continent, who employed himself much in field sports, who was unmarried, and had a sister who was reckoned among the beauties of the county.

While the conversation was thus going on, to Middleton's astonishment there came a knock at the door of the room, and, without waiting for a response, it was opened, and there appeared at it the same young woman whom he had already met. She came in with perfect freedom and familiarity, and was received quietly by the old gentleman; who, however, by his manner towards Middleton, indicated that he was now to take his leave. He did so, after settling the hour at which the excursion of the next day was to take place. This arranged, he departed, with much to

ing there, and become potent if he now uncovered them. There was something that startled him, in the strange, wild light, which gleamed from the old man's eyes, as he threw out the suggestions which had opened this prospect to him. What right had he — an American, Republican, disconnected with this country so long, alien from its habits of thought and life, reverencing none of the things which Englishmen revered — what right had he to come with these musty claims from the dim past, to disturb them in the life that belonged to them? There was a higher and a deeper law than any connected with ancestral claims which he could assert; and he had an idea that the law bade him keep to the country which his ancestor had chosen and to its institutions, and not meddle nor make with England. The roots of his family tree could not

try. On their way, Hammond was not very communicative, occasionally dropping some shrewd remark with a good deal of acidity in it; now and then, too, favoring his companion with some reminiscence of local antiquity; but oftenest silent. Thus they went on, and entered the park of Pemberton Manor by a bypath, over a stile and one of those footways, which are always so well worth threading out in England, leading the pedestrian into picturesque and characteristic scenes, when the highroad would show him nothing except what was commonplace and uninteresting. Now the gables of the old manor house appeared before them, rising amidst the hereditary woods, which doubtless dated from a time beyond the days which Middleton fondly recalled, when his ancestors had walked beneath their shade. On each side of

influence of cultivation.

Arriving at a side door of the mansion, Hammond rang the bell, and a servant soon appeared. He seemed to know the old man, and immediately acceded to his request to be permitted to show his companion the house; although it was not precisely a show-house, nor was this the hour when strangers were usually admitted. They entered; and the servant did not give himself the trouble to act as a cicerone to the two visitants, but carelessly said to the old gentleman that he knew the rooms, and that he would leave him to discourse to his friend about them. Accordingly, they went into the old hall, a dark oaken-panelled room, of no great height, with many doors opening into it. There was a fire burning on the hearth; indeed, it was the custom of the house to keep it up

friend, but with a pleasant and not irksome conversation. "I am glad to see you here again," said he. "What? I have an hour of leisure; for, to say the truth, the day hangs rather heavy till the shooting season begins. Come; as you have a friend with you, I will be your cicerone myself about the house, and show you whatever mouldy objects of interest it contains."

He then graciously noticed the old man's companion, but without asking or seeming to expect an introduction; for, after a careless glance at him, he had evidently set him down as a person without social claims, a young man in the rank of life fitted to associate with an inmate of Pemberton's Hospital. And it must be noticed that his treatment of Middleton was not on that account the less kind, though far

APPENDIX

from being so elaborately courteous as if he had met him as an equal. "You have had something of a walk," said he, "and it is a rather hot day. The beer of Pemberton Manor has been reckoned good these hundred years; will you taste it?"

Hammond accepted the offer, and the beer was brought in a foaming tankard; but Middleton declined it, for in truth there was a singular emotion in his breast, as if the old enmity, the ancient injuries, were not yet atoned for, and as if he must not accept the hospitality of one who represented his hereditary foe. He felt, too, as if there were something unworthy, a certain want of fairness, in entering clandestinely the house, and talking with its occupant under a veil, as it were; and had he seen clearly how to do it, he would perhaps at that moment have fairly told Mr. Eldredge that he brought with him the character of kinsman, and must be received on that grade or none. But it was not easy to do this; and after all, there was no clear reason why he should do it; so he let the matter pass, merely declining to take the refreshment, and keeping himself quiet and retired.

Squire Eldredge seemed to be a good, ordinary sort of gentleman, reasonably well educated, and with few ideas beyond his estate and neighborhood, though he had once held a seat in Parliament for part of a term. Middleton could not but contrast him, with an inward smile, with the shrewd, alert politicians, their faculties all sharpened to the utmost, whom he had known and consorted with in the American Congress. Hammond had slightly informed him that his companion was an American; and Mr. Eldredge immediately gave proof

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

of the extent of his knowledge of that country, by inquiring whether he came from the State of New England, and whether Mr. Webster was still President of the United States; questions to which Middleton returned answers that led to no further conversation. These little preliminaries over, they continued their ramble through the house, going through tortuous passages, up and down little flights of steps, and entering chambers that had all the charm of discoveries of hidden regions; loitering about, in short, in a labyrinth calculated to put the head into a delightful confusion. Some of these rooms contained their time-honored furniture, all in the best possible repair, heavy, dark, polished; beds that had been marriage beds and dying beds over and over again; chairs with carved backs; and all manner of old world curiosities; family pictures, and samplers, and embroidery; fragments of tapestry; an inlaid floor; everything having a story to it, though, to say the truth, the possessor of these curiosities made but a bungling piece of work in telling the legends connected with them. In one or two instances Hammond corrected him.

By and by they came to what had once been the principal bedroom of the house; though its gloom, and some circumstances of family misfortune that had happened long ago, had caused it to fall into disrepute in latter times; and it was now called the Haunted Chamber, or the Ghost's Chamber. The furniture of this room, however, was particularly rich in its antique magnificence; and one of the principal objects was a great black cabinet of ebony and ivory, such as may often be seen in old English houses, and perhaps often

APPENDIX

in the palaces of Italy, in which country they perhaps originated. This present cabinet was known to have been in the house as long ago as the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and how much longer neither tradition nor record told. Hammond particularly directed Middleton's attention to it.

"There is nothing in th's house," said he, "better worth your attention than that cabinet. Consider its plan; it represents a stately mansion, with pillars, an entrance, with a lofty flight of steps, windows, and everything perfect. Examine it well."

There was such an emphasis in the old man's way of speaking that Middleton turned suddenly round from all that he had been looking at, and fixed his whole attention on the cabinet; and strangely enough, it seemed to be the representative, in small, of something that he had seen in a dream. To say the truth, if some cunning workman had been employed to copy his idea of the old family mansion, on a scale of half an inch to a yard, and in ebony and ivory instead of stone, he could not have produced a closer imitation. Everything was there.

"This is miraculous!" exclaimed he. "I do not understand it."

"Your friend seems to be curious in these matters," said Mr. Eldredge graciously. "Perhaps he is of some trade that makes this sort of manufacture particularly interesting to him. You are quite at liberty, my friend, to open the cabinet and inspect it as minutely as you wish. It is an article that has a good deal to do with an obscure portion of our family history. Look, here is the key, and the mode of opening the outer door of the

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

palace, as we may well call it." So saying, he threw open the outer door, and disclosed within the mimic likeness of a stately entrance hall, with a floor chequered of ebony and ivory. There were other doors that seemed to open into apartments in the interior of the palace ; but when Mr. Eldredge threw them likewise wide, they proved to be drawers and secret receptacles, where papers, jewels, money, anything that it was desirable to store away secretly, might be kept.

"You said, sir," said Middleton thoughtfully, "that your family history contained matter of interest in reference to this cabinet. Might I inquire what those legends are?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Eldredge, musing a little. "I see no reason why I should have any idle concealment about the matter, especially to a foreigner and a man whom I am never likely to see again. You must know, then, my friend, that there was once a time when this cabinet was known to contain the fate of the estate and its possessors ; and if it had held all that it was supposed to hold, I should not now be the lord of Pemberton Manor, nor the claimant of an ancient title. But my father, and his father before him, and his father besides, have held the estate and prospered on it ; and I think we may fairly conclude now that the cabinet contains nothing except what we see."

And he rapidly again threw open one after another all the numerous drawers and receptacles of the cabinet.

"It is an interesting object," said Middleton, after looking very closely and with great attention at it,

except, perhaps, the open air."

In fact, Middleton, recovering himself, apologized to Mr. Hammond [Eldredge?]; and as they had now seen nearly the whole of the house, the two visitants took their leave, with many kindly offers on Mr. Eldredge's part to permit the young man to view the cabinet whenever he wished. As they went out of the house (it was by another door than that which gave them entrance), Hammond laid his hand on Middleton's shoulder and pointed to a stone on the threshold, on which he was about to set his foot. "Take care!" said he. "It is the Bloody Footstep."

Middleton looked down and saw something, indeed, very like the shape of a footprint, with a hue very like that of blood. It was a twilight sort of a place, beneath a porch, which was much overshadowed by trees

“*Is your friend ill?*”

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

and shrubbery. It might have been blood; but he rather thought, in his wicked scepticism, that it was a natural, reddish stain in the stone. He measured his own foot, however, in the Bloody Footstep, and went on.

May 10th, Monday. — This is the present aspect of the story: Middleton is the descendant of a family long settled in the United States; his ancestor having emigrated to New England with the Pilgrims; or, perhaps, at a still earlier date, to Virginia with Raleigh's colonists. There had been a family dissension, — a bitter hostility between two brothers in England; on account, probably, of a love affair, the two both being attached to the same lady. By the influence of the family on both sides, the young lady had formed an engagement with the elder brother, although her affections had settled on the younger. The marriage was about to take place when the younger brother and the bride both disappeared, and were never heard of with any certainty afterwards; but it was believed at the time that he had been killed, and in proof of it a bloody footstep remained on the threshold of the ancestral mansion. There were rumors afterwards, traditionally continued to the present day, that the younger brother and the bride were seen, and together, in England; and that some voyager across the sea had found them living together, husband and wife, on the other side of the Atlantic. But the elder brother became a moody and reserved man, never married, and left the inheritance to the children of a third brother, who then became the representative of the family in England; and the better authenticated story was that the second

APPENDIX

brother had really been slain, and that the young lady (for all the parties may have been Catholic) had gone to the Continent and taken the veil there. Such was the family history as known or surmised in England, and in the neighborhood of the manor house, where the Bloody Footstep still remained on the threshold; and the posterity of the third brother still held the estate, and perhaps were claimants of an ancient baronage, long in abeyance.

Now, on the other side of the Atlantic, the second brother and the young lady had really been married, and became the parents of a posterity, still extant, of which the Middleton of the romance is the surviving male. Perhaps he had changed his name, being so much tortured with the evil and wrong that had sprung up in his family, so remorseful, so outraged, that he wished to disconnect himself with all the past, and begin life quite anew in a new world. But both he and his wife, though happy in one another, had been remorsefully and sadly so; and, with such feelings, they had never again communicated with their respective families, nor had given their children the means of doing so. There must, I think, have been something nearly approaching to guilt on the second brother's part, and the bride should have broken a solemnly plighted troth to the elder brother, breaking away from him when almost his wife. The elder brother had been known to have been wounded at the time of the second brother's disappearance; and it had been the surmise that he had received this hurt in the personal conflict in which the latter was slain. But in truth the second brother had stabbed him in the

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

emergency of being discovered in the act of escaping with the bride ; and this was what weighed upon his conscience throughout life in America. The American family had prolonged itself through various fortunes, and all the ups and downs incident to our institutions, until the present day. They had some old family documents, which had been rather carelessly kept ; but the present representative, being an educated man, had looked over them, and found one which interested him strongly. It was — what was it ? — perhaps a copy of a letter written by his ancestor on his deathbed, telling his real name, and relating the above incidents. These incidents had come down in a vague, wild way, traditionally, in the American family, forming a wondrous and incredible legend, which Middleton had often laughed at, yet been greatly interested in ; and the discovery of this document seemed to give a certain aspect of veracity and reality to the tradition. Perhaps, however, the document only related to the change of name, and made reference to certain evidences by which, if any descendant of the family should deem it expedient, he might prove his hereditary identity. The legend must be accounted for by having been gathered from the talk of the first ancestor and his wife. There must be in existence, in the early records of the colony, an authenticated statement of this change of name, and satisfactory proofs that the American family, long known as Middleton, were really a branch of the English family of Eldredge, or whatever. And in the legend, though not in the written document, there must be an account of a certain magnificent, almost palatial residence, which

APPENDIX

Middleton shall presume to be the ancestral home; and in this palace there shall be said to be a certain secret chamber, or receptacle, where is repositied a document that shall complete the evidence of the genealogical descent.

Middleton is still a young man, but already a distinguished one in his own country; he has entered early into politics, been sent to Congress, but having met with some disappointments in his ambitious hopes, and being disgusted with the fierceness of political contests in our country, he has come abroad for recreation and rest. His imagination has dwelt much, in his boyhood, on the legendary story of his family; and the discovery of the document has revived these dreams. He determines to search out the family mansion; and thus he arrives, bringing half of a story, being the only part known in America, to join it on to the other half, which is the only part known in England. In an introduction I must do the best I can to state his side of the matter to the reader, he having communicated it to me in a friendly way, at the Consulate; as many people have communicated quite as wild pretensions to English genealogies.

He comes to the midland counties of England, where he conceives his claims to lie, and seeks for his ancestral home; but there are difficulties in the way of finding it, the estates having passed into the female line, though still remaining in the blood. By and by, however, he comes to an old town where there is one of the charitable institutions bearing the name of his family, by whose beneficence it had indeed been founded, in Queen Elizabeth's time. He of course

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

becomes interested in this Hospital ; he finds it still going on, precisely as it did in the old days ; and all the character and life of the establishment must be picturesquely described. Here he gets acquainted with an old man, an inmate of the Hospital, who (if the uncontrollable fatality of the story will permit) must have an active influence on the ensuing events. I suppose him to have been an American, but to have fled his country and taken refuge in England ; he shall have been a man of the Nicholas Biddle stamp, a mighty speculator, the ruin of whose schemes had crushed hundreds of people, and Middleton's father among the rest. Here he had quitted the activity of his mind, as well as he could, becoming a local antiquary, etc., and he has made himself acquainted with the family history of the Eldredges, knowing more about it than the members of the family themselves do. He had known in America (from Middleton's father, who was his friend) the legends preserved in this branch of the family, and perhaps had been struck by the way in which they fit into the English legends ; at any rate, this strikes him when Middleton tells him his story and shows him the document respecting the change of name. After various conversations together (in which, however, the old man keeps the secret of his own identity, and indeed acts as mysteriously as possible), they go together to visit the ancestral mansion. Perhaps it should not be in their first visit that the cabinet, representing the stately mansion, shall be seen. But the Bloody Footstep may ; which shall interest Middleton much, both because Hammond has told him the English tradition respecting it, and be-

have been if this secret, which seemed so golden, had remained in the obscurity in which two hundred years had buried it! That deep, old, grass-grown grave being opened, out from it streamed into the sunshine the old fatalities, the old crimes, the old misfortunes, the sorrows, that seemed to have departed from the family forever. But it was too late now to close it up; he must follow out the thread that led him on, — the thread of fate, if you choose to call it so; but rather the impulse of an evil will, a stubborn self-interest, a desire for certain objects of ambition which were preferred to what yet were recognized as real goods. Thus reasoned, thus raved, Eldredge, as he considered the things that he had done, and still intended to do; nor did these perceptions make the slightest difference in his plans, nor in the activity with which he set

would use to gain his ends through his own unassisted efforts. In the struggle with himself through which he had passed, he had exhausted pretty much all the feelings that he had to bestow on this matter; and now he was ready to take hold of almost any temptation that might present itself, so long as it showed a good prospect of success and a plausible chance of impunity. While he was thus musing, he heard a female voice chanting some song, like a bird's among the pleasant foliage of the trees, and soon he saw at the end of a wood walk Alice, with her basket on her arm, passing on toward the village. She looked towards him as she passed, but made no pause nor yet hastened her steps, not seeming to think it worth her while to be influenced by him. He hurried forward and overtook her.

that absorbed him fully, and the zeal for the development of which made him careless for the result in respect to its good or evil, but only desirous that it show itself. As for Alice, she seemed to skim lightly through all these matters, whether as a spirit of good or ill he could not satisfactorily judge. He could not think her wicked ; yet her actions seemed unaccountable on the plea that she was otherwise. It was another characteristic thread in the wild web of madness that had spun itself about all the prominent characters of our story. And when Middleton thought of these things, he felt as if it might be his duty (supposing he had the power) to shovel the earth again into the pit that he had been the means of opening ; but also felt that, whether duty or not, he would never perform it.

For, you see, on the American's arrival he had

these petty and wretched circumstances, was. Let the past alone: do not seek to renew it; press on to higher and better things, — at all events, to other things; and be assured that the right way can never be that which leads you back to the identical shapes that you long ago left behind. Onward, onward, onward!"

"What have you to do here?" said Alice. "Your lot is in another land. You have seen the birthplace of your forefathers, and have gratified your natural yearning for it; now return, and cast in your lot with your own people, let it be what it will. I fully believe that it is such a lot as the world has never yet seen, and that the faults, the weaknesses, the errors, of your countrymen will vanish away like morning mists before the rising sun. You can do nothing better than to go back."

APPENDIX

"This is strange advice, Alice," said Middleton, gazing at her and smiling. "Go back, with such a fair prospect before me; that were strange indeed! It is enough to keep me here, that here only I shall see you,—enough to make me rejoice to have come, that I have found you here."

"Do not speak in this foolish way!" cried Alice, panting. "I am giving you the best advice, and speaking in the wisest way I am capable of,—speaking on good grounds too,—and you turn me aside with a silly compliment. I tell you that this is no comedy in which we are performers, but a deep, sad tragedy; and that it depends most upon you whether or no it shall be pressed to a catastrophe. Think well of it."

"I have thought, Alice," responded the young man, "and I must let things take their course; if, indeed, it depends at all upon me, which I see no present reason to suppose. Yet I wish you would explain to me what you mean."

To take up the story from the point where we left it: by the aid of the American's revelations, some light is thrown upon points of family history, which induce the English possessor of the estate to suppose that the time has come for asserting his claim to a title which has long been in abeyance. He therefore sets about it, and engages in great expenses, besides contracting the enmity of many persons, with whose interests he interferes. A further complication is brought about by the secret interference of the old Hospitaller, and Alice goes singing and dancing through the whole, in a way that makes her seem like

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

a beautiful devil, though finally it will be recognized that she is an angel of light. Middleton, half bewildered, can scarcely tell how much of this is due to his own agency; how much is independent of him and would have happened had he stayed on his own side of the water. By and by a further and unexpected development presents the singular fact that he himself is the heir to whatever claims there are, whether of property or rank,—all centring in him as the representative of the eldest brother. On this discovery there ensues a tragedy in the death of the present possessor of the estate, who has staked everything upon the issue; and Middleton, standing amid the ruin and desolation of which he has been the innocent cause, resigns all the claims which he might now assert, and retires, arm in arm with Alice, who has encouraged him to take this course, and to act up to his character. The estate takes a passage into the female line, and the old name becomes extinct, nor does Middleton seek to continue it by resuming it in place of the one long ago assumed by his ancestor. Thus he and his wife become the Adam and Eve of a new epoch, and the fitting missionaries of a new social faith, of which there must be continual hints through the book.

A knot of characters may be introduced as gathering around Middleton, comprising expatriated Americans of all sorts: the wandering printer who came to me so often at the Consulate, who said he was a native of Philadelphia, and could not go home in the thirty years that he had been trying to do so, for lack of the money to pay his passage; the large banker;

APPENDIX

the consul of Leeds ; the woman asserting her claims to half Liverpool ; the gifted literary lady, maddened by Shakespeare, etc., etc. ; the Yankee who had been driven insane by the Queen's notice, slight as it was, of the photographs of his two children which he had sent her. I have not yet struck the true keynote of this Romance, and until I do, and unless I do, I shall write nothing but tediousness and nonsense. I do not wish it to be a picture of life, but a Romance, grim, grotesque, quaint, of which the Hospital might be the fitting scene. It might have so much of the hues of life that the reader should sometimes think it was intended for a picture, yet the atmosphere should be such as to excuse all wildness. In the Introduction, I might disclaim all intention to draw a real picture, but say that the continual meetings I had with Americans bent on such errands had suggested this wild story. The descriptions of scenery, etc., and of the Hospital, might be correct, but there should be a tinge of the grotesque given to all the characters and events. The tragic and the gentler pathetic need not be excluded by the tone and treatment. If I could but write one central scene in this vein, all the rest of the Romance would readily arrange itself around that nucleus. The begging girl would be another American character ; the actress too ; the caravan people. It must be humorous work, or nothing.

III

May 12th, Wednesday. — Middleton found his abode here becoming daily more interesting ; and he some-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

times thought that it was the sympathies with the place and people, buried under the supergrowth of so many ages, but now coming forth with the life and vigor of a fountain, that, long hidden beneath earth and ruins, gushes out singing into the sunshine, as soon as these are removed. He wandered about the neighborhood with insatiable interest; sometimes, and often, lying on a hillside and gazing at the gray tower of the church; sometimes coming into the village clustered round that same church, and looking at the old timber and plaster houses, the same, except that the thatch had probably been often renewed, that they used to be in his ancestor's days. In those old cottages still dwelt the families, the —s, the Prices, the Hopnorts, the Copleys, that had dwelt there when America was a scattered progeny of infant colonies; and in the churchyard were the graves of all the generations since — including the dust of those who had seen his ancestor's face before his departure.

The graves, outside the church walls indeed, bore no marks of this antiquity; for it seems not to have been an early practice in England to put stones over such graves; and where it has been done, the climate causes the inscriptions soon to become obliterated and unintelligible. But, within the church, there were rich words of the personages and times with whom Middleton's musings held so much converse.

But one of his greatest employments and pastimes was to ramble through the grounds of Smithell's, making himself as well acquainted with its wood paths, its glens, its woods, its venerable trees, as if he had been bred up there from infancy. Some of those old oaks

APPENDIX'

his ancestor might have been acquainted with, while they were already sturdy and well-grown trees ; might have climbed them in boyhood ; might have mused beneath them as a lover ; might have flung himself at full length on the turf beneath them, in the bitter anguish that must have preceded his departure forever from the home of his forefathers. In order to secure an uninterrupted enjoyment of his rambles here, Middleton had secured the good will of the gamekeepers and other underlings whom he was likely to meet about the grounds, by giving them a shilling or a half-crown ; and he was now free to wander where he would, with only the advice rather than the caution, to keep out of the way of their old master, — for there might be trouble, if he should meet a stranger on the grounds, in any of his tantrums. But, in fact, Mr. Eldredge was not much in the habit of walking about the grounds ; and there were hours of every day, during which it was altogether improbable that he would have emerged from his own apartments in the manor house. These were the hours, therefore, when Middleton most frequented the estate ; although, to say the truth, he would gladly have so timed his visits as to meet and form an acquaintance with the lonely lord of this beautiful property, his own kinsman, though with so many ages of dark oblivion between. For Middleton had not that feeling of infinite distance in the relationship, which he would have had if his branch of the family had continued in England, and had not intermarried with the other branch, through such a long waste of years ; he rather felt as if he were the original emigrant, who, long resident on a foreign shore, had now

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

returned, with a heart brimful of tenderness, to revisit the scenes of his youth, and renew his tender relations with those who shared his own blood.

There was not, however, much in what he heard of the character of the present possessor of the estate — or indeed in the strong family characteristic that had become hereditary — to encourage him to attempt any advances. It is very probable that the religion of Mr. Eldredge, as a Catholic, may have excited a prejudice against him, as it certainly had insulated the family, in a great degree, from the sympathies of the neighborhood. Mr. Eldredge, moreover, had resided long on the Continent; long in Italy; and had come back with habits that little accorded with those of the gentry of the neighborhood; so that, in fact, he was almost as much of a stranger, and perhaps quite as little of a real Englishman, as Middleton himself. Be that as it might, Middleton, when he sought to learn something about him, heard the strangest stories of his habits of life, of his temper, and of his employments, from the people with whom he conversed. The old legend, turning upon the monomania of the family, was revived in full force in reference to this poor gentleman; and many a time Middleton's interlocutors shook their wise heads, saying, with a knowing look and under their breath, that the old gentleman was looking for the track of the Bloody Footstep. They fabled — or said, for it might not have been a false story — that every descendant of this house had a certain portion of his life, during which he sought the track of that footstep which was left on the threshold of the mansion; that he sought it far and wide, over

APPENDIX

every foot of the estate; not only on the estate, but throughout the neighborhood; not only in the neighborhood, but all over England; not only throughout England, but all about the world. It was the belief of the neighborhood—at least of some old men and women in it—that the long period of Mr. Eldredge's absence from England had been spent in the search for some trace of those departing footsteps that had never returned. It is very possible—probable, indeed—that there may have been some ground for this remarkable legend; not that it is to be credited that the family of Eldredge, being reckoned among sane men, would seriously have sought, years and generations after the fact, for the first track of those bloody footsteps which the first rain of drippy England must have washed away; to say nothing of the leaves that had fallen and the growth and decay of so many seasons, that covered all traces of them since. But nothing is more probable than that the continual recurrence to the family genealogy, which had been necessitated by the matter of the dormant peerage, had caused the Eldredges, from father to son, to keep alive an interest in that ancestor who had disappeared, and who had been supposed to carry some of the most important family papers with him. But yet it gave Middleton a strange thrill of pleasure, that had something fearful in it, to think that all through these ages he had been waited for, sought for, anxiously expected, as it were; it seemed as if the very ghosts of his kindred, a long shadowy line, held forth their dim arms to welcome him; a line stretching back to the ghosts of those who had flourished in the old, old times; the

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

doubletted and beruffled knightly shades of Queen Elizabeth's time; a long line, stretching from the mediæval ages, and their duskiness, downward, downward, with only one vacant space, that of him who had left the Bloody Footstep. There was an inexpressible pleasure (airy and evanescent, gone in a moment if he dwelt upon it too thoughtfully, but very sweet) to Middleton's imagination, in this idea. When he reflected, however, that his revelations, if they had any effect at all, might serve only to quench the hopes of these long expectants, it of course made him hesitate to declare himself.

One afternoon, when he was in the midst of musings such as this, he saw at a distance through the park, in the direction of the manor house, a person who seemed to be walking slowly and seeking for something upon the ground. He was a long way off when Middleton first perceived him; and there were two clumps of trees and underbrush, with interspersed tracts of sunny lawn, between them. The person, whoever he was, kept on, and plunged into the first clump of shrubbery, still keeping his eyes on the ground, as if intensely searching for something. When he emerged from the concealment of the first clump of shrubbery, Middleton saw that he was a tall, thin person, in a dark dress; and this was the chief observation that the distance enabled him to make, as the figure kept slowly onward, in a somewhat wavering line, and plunged into the second clump of shrubbery. From that, too, he emerged; and soon appeared to be a thin elderly figure, of a dark man with gray hair, bent, as it seemed to Middleton, with infirmity, for his

APPENDIX

figure still stooped even in the intervals when he did not appear to be tracking the ground. But Middleton could not but be surprised at the singular appearance the figure had of setting its foot, at every step, just where a previous footstep had been made, as if he wanted to measure his whole pathway in the track of somebody who had recently gone over the ground in advance of him. Middleton was sitting at the foot of an oak; and he began to feel some awkwardness in the consideration of what he would do if Mr. Eldredge — for he could not doubt that it was he — were to be led just to this spot, in pursuit of his singular occupation. And even so it proved.

Middleton could not feel it manly to fly and hide himself, like a guilty thing; and indeed the hospitality of the English country gentleman in many cases gives the neighborhood and the stranger a certain degree of freedom in the use of the broad expanse of ground in which they and their forefathers have loved to sequester their residences. The figure kept on, showing more and more distinctly the tall, meagre, not unvenerable features of a gentleman in the decline of life, apparently in ill health; with a dark face, that might once have been full of energy, but now seemed enfeebled by time, passion, and perhaps sorrow. But it was strange to see the earnestness with which he looked on the ground, and the accuracy with which he at last set his foot, apparently adjusting it exactly to some footprint before him; and Middleton doubted not that, having studied and re-studied the family records and the judicial examinations which described exactly the track that was seen the day after the mem-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

orable disappearance of his ancestor, Mr. Eldredge was now, in some freak, or for some purpose best known to himself, practically following it out. And follow it out he did, until at last he lifted up his eyes, muttering to himself, "At this point the footsteps wholly disappear."

Lifting his eyes, as we have said, while thus regretfully and despairingly muttering these words, he saw Middleton against the oak, within three paces of him.

May 13th, Thursday. — Mr. Eldredge (for it was he) first kept his eyes fixed full on Middleton's face, with an expression as if he saw him not; but gradually — slowly, at first — he seemed to become aware of his presence; then, with a sudden flush, he took in the idea that he was encountered by a stranger in his secret mood. A flush of anger or shame, perhaps both, reddened over his face; his eyes gleamed; and he spoke hastily and roughly.

"Who are you?" he said. "How come you here? I allow no intruders in my park. Begone, fellow!"

"Really, sir, I did not mean to intrude upon you," said Middleton blandly. "I am aware that I owe you an apology; but the beauties of your park must plead my excuse, and the constant kindness of [the] English gentleman, which admits a stranger to the privilege of enjoying so much of the beauty in which he himself dwells as the stranger's taste permits him to enjoy."

"An artist, perhaps," said Mr. Eldredge, somewhat less uncourteously. "I am told that they love to come here and sketch those old oaks and their vistas, and the old mansion yonder. But you are an intrusive

APPENDIX

figure still stooped even in the intervals when he did not appear to be tracking the ground. But Middleton could not but be surprised at the singular appearance the figure had of setting its foot, at every step, just where a previous footstep had been made, as if he wanted to measure his whole pathway in the track of somebody who had recently gone over the ground in advance of him. Middleton was sitting at the foot of an oak; and he began to feel some awkwardness in the consideration of what he would do if Mr. Eldredge—for he could not doubt that it was he—were to be led just to this spot, in pursuit of his singular occupation. And even so it proved.

Middleton could not feel it manly to fly and hide himself, like a guilty thing; and indeed the hospitality of the English country gentleman in many cases gives the neighborhood and the stranger a certain degree of freedom in the use of the broad expanse of ground in which they and their forefathers have loved to sequester their residences. The figure kept on, showing more and more distinctly the tall, meagre, not unvenerable features of a gentleman in the decline of life, apparently in ill health; with a dark face, that might once have been full of energy, but now seemed enfeebled by time, passion, and perhaps sorrow. But it was strange to see the earnestness with which he looked on the ground, and the accuracy with which he at last set his foot, apparently adjusting it exactly to some footprint before him; and Middleton doubted not that, having studied and re-studied the family records and the judicial examinations which described exactly the track that was seen the day after the mem-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

orable disappearance of his ancestor, Mr. Eldredge was now, in some freak, or for some purpose best known to himself, practically following it out. And follow it out he did, until at last he lifted up his eyes, muttering to himself, "At this point the footsteps wholly disappear."

Lifting his eyes, as we have said, while thus regretfully and despairingly muttering these words, he saw Middleton against the oak, within three paces of him.

May 13th, Thursday.—Mr. Eldredge (for it was he) first kept his eyes fixed full on Middleton's face, with an expression as if he saw him not; but gradually—slowly, at first—he seemed to become aware of his presence; then, with a sudden flush, he took in the idea that he was encountered by a stranger in his secret mood. A flush of anger or shame, perhaps both, reddened over his face; his eyes gleamed; and he spoke hastily and roughly.

"Who are you?" he said. "How come you here? I allow no intruders in my park. Begone, fellow!"

"Really, sir, I did not mean to intrude upon you," said Middleton blandly. "I am aware that I owe you an apology; but the beauties of your park must plead my excuse, and the constant kindness of [the] English gentleman, which admits a stranger to the privilege of enjoying so much of the beauty in which he himself dwells as the stranger's taste permits him to enjoy."

"An artist, perhaps," said Mr. Eldredge, somewhat less uncourteously. "I am told that they love to come here and sketch those old oaks and their vistas, and the old mansion yonder. But you are an intrusive

APPENDIX

set, you artists, and think that a pencil and a sheet of paper may be your passport anywhere. You are mistaken, sir. My park is not open to strangers."

"I am sorry, then, to have intruded upon you," said Middleton, still in good humor; for in truth he felt a sort of kindness, a sentiment, ridiculous as it may appear, of kindred towards the old gentleman, and besides was not unwilling in any way to prolong a conversation in which he found a singular interest. "I am sorry, especially as I have not even the excuse you kindly suggest for me. I am not an artist, only an American, who have strayed hither to enjoy this gentle, cultivated, tamed nature which I find in English parks, so contrasting with the wild, rugged nature of my native land. I beg your pardon, and will retire."

"An American," repeated Mr. Eldredge, looking curiously at him. "Ah, you are wild men in that country, I suppose, and cannot conceive that an English gentleman encloses his grounds — or that his ancestors have done so before him — for his own pleasure and convenience, and does not calculate on having it infringed upon by everybody, like your own forests, as you say. It is a curious country, that of yours; and in Italy I have seen curious people from it."

"True, sir," said Middleton, smiling. "We send queer specimens abroad; but Englishmen should consider that we spring from them, and that we present after all only a picture of their own characteristics, a little varied by climate and in situation."

Mr. Eldredge looked at him with a certain kind of

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

interest, and it seemed to Middleton that he was not unwilling to continue the conversation, if a fair way to do so could only be offered to him. A secluded man often grasps at any opportunity of communicating with his kind, when it is casually offered to him, and for the nonce is surprisingly familiar, running out towards his chance companion with the gush of a dammed-up torrent, suddenly unlocked. As Middleton made a motion to retire, he put out his hand with an air of authority to restrain him.

"Stay," said he. "Now that you are here, the mischief is done, and you cannot repair it by hastening away. You have interrupted me in my mood of thought, and must pay the penalty by suggesting other thoughts. I am a lonely man here, having spent most of my life abroad, and am separated from my neighbors by various circumstances. You seem to be an intelligent man. I should like to ask you a few questions about your country."

He looked at Middleton as he spoke, and seemed to be considering in what rank of life he should place him; his dress being such as suited a humble rank. He seemed not to have come to any very certain decision on this point.

"I remember," said he, "you have no distinctions of rank in your country; a convenient thing enough, in some respects. When there are no gentlemen, all are gentlemen. So let it be. You speak of being Englishmen; and it has often occurred to me that Englishmen have left this country and been much missed and sought after, who might perhaps be sought there successfully."

APPENDIX

"It is certainly so, Mr. Eldredge," said Middleton, lifting his eyes to his face as he spoke, and then turning them aside. "Many footsteps, the track of which is lost in England, might be found reappearing on the other side of the Atlantic; ay, though it be hundreds of years since the track was lost here."

Middleton, though he had refrained from looking full at Mr. Eldredge as he spoke, was conscious that he gave a great start; and he remained silent for a moment or two, and when he spoke there was the tremor in his voice of a nerve that had been struck and still vibrated.

"That is a singular idea of yours," he at length said; "not singular in itself, but strangely coincident with something that happened to be occupying my mind. Have you ever heard any such instances as you speak of?"

"Yes," replied Middleton, "I have had pointed out to me the rightful heir to a Scottish earldom, in the person of an American farmer, in his shirt sleeves. There are many Americans who believe themselves to hold similar claims. And I have known one family, at least, who had in their possession, and had had for two centuries, a secret that might have been worth wealth and honors if known in England. Indeed, being kindred as we are, it cannot but be the case."

Mr. Eldredge appeared to be much struck by these last words, and gazed wistfully, almost wildly, at Middleton, as if debating with himself whether to say more. He made a step or two aside; then returned abruptly, and spoke.

"Can you tell me the name of the family in which

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

this secret was kept?" said he; "and the nature of the secret?"

"The nature of the secret," said Middleton, smiling, "was not likely to be extended to any one out of the family. The name borne by the family was Middleton. There is no member of it, so far as I am aware, at this moment remaining in America."

"And has the secret died with them?" asked Mr. Eldredge.

"They communicated it to none," said Middleton.

"It is a pity! It was a villainous wrong," said Mr. Eldredge. "And so, it may be, some ancient line, in the old country, is defrauded of its rights for want of what might have been obtained from this Yankee, whose democracy has demoralized them to the perception of what is due to the antiquity of descent, and of the bounden duty that there is, in all ranks, to keep up the honor of a family that has had potency enough to preserve itself in distinction for a thousand years."

"Yes," said Middleton quietly, "we have sympathy with what is strong and vivacious to-day; none with what was so yesterday."

The remark seemed not to please Mr. Eldredge; he frowned, and muttered something to himself; but recovering himself, addressed Middleton with more courtesy than at the commencement of their interview; and, with this graciousness, his face and manner grew very agreeable, almost fascinating: he [was] still haughty, however.

"Well, sir," said he, "I am not sorry to have met you. I am a solitary man, as I have said, and a little

APPENDIX

communication with a stranger is a refreshment, which I enjoy seldom enough to be sensible of it. Pray, are you staying hereabouts ? ”

Middleton signified to him that he might probably spend some little time in the village.

“Then, during your stay,” said Mr. Eldredge, “make free use of the walks in these grounds ; and though it is not probable that you will meet me in them again, you need apprehend no second questioning of your right to be here. My house has many points of curiosity that may be of interest to a stranger from a new country. Perhaps you have heard of some of them.”

“I have heard some wild legend about a Bloody Footstep,” answered Middleton ; “indeed, I think I remember hearing something about it in my own country ; and having a fanciful sort of interest in such things, I took advantage of the hospitable custom which opens the doors of curious old houses to strangers to go to see it. It seemed to me, I confess, only a natural stain in the old stone that forms the doorstep.”

“There, sir,” said Mr. Eldredge, “let me say that you came to a very foolish conclusion ; and so, good-by, sir.”

And without further ceremony, he cast an angry glance at Middleton, who perceived that the old gentleman reckoned the Bloody Footstep among his ancestral honors, and would probably have parted with his claim to the peerage almost as soon as have given up the legend.

Present aspect of the story: Middleton on his ar-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

rival becomes acquainted with the old Hospitaller, and is familiarized at the Hospital. He pays a visit in his company to the manor house, but merely glimpses at its remarkable things, at this visit, among others at the old cabinet, which does not, at first view, strike him very strongly. But, on musing about his visit afterwards, he finds the recollection of the cabinet strangely identifying itself with his previous imaginary picture of the palatial mansion; so that at last he begins to conceive the mistake he has made. At this first [visit], he does not have a personal interview with the possessor of the estate; but, as the Hospitaller and himself go from room to room, he finds that the owner is preceding them, shyly flitting like a ghost, so as to avoid them. Then there is a chapter about the character of the Eldredge of the day, a Catholic, a morbid, shy man, representing all the peculiarities of an old family, and generally thought to be insane. And then comes the interview between him and Middleton, where the latter excites such an interest that he dwells upon the old man's mind, and the latter probably takes pains to obtain further intercourse with him, and perhaps invites him to dinner, and [to] spend a night in his house. If so, this second meeting must lead to the examination of the cabinet, and the discovery of some family documents in it. Perhaps the cabinet may be in Middleton's sleeping chamber, and he examines it by himself, before going to bed; and finds out a secret which will perplex him how to deal with it.

May 14th, Friday. — We have spoken several times already of a young girl, who was seen at this period

APPENDIX

about the little antiquated village of Smithell's, — a girl in manners and in aspect unlike those of the cottages amid which she dwelt. Middleton had now so often met her, and in solitary places, that an acquaintance had inevitably established itself between them. He had ascertained that she had lodgings at a farmhouse near by, and that she was connected in some way with the old Hospitaller, whose acquaintance had proved of such interest to him ; but more than this he could not learn either from her or others. But he was greatly attracted and interested by the free spirit and fearlessness of this young woman ; nor could he conceive where, in staid and formal England, she had grown up to be such as she was, so without manner, so without art, yet so capable of doing and thinking for herself. She had no reserve, apparently, yet never seemed to sin against decorum ; it never appeared to restrain her that anything she might wish to do was contrary to custom ; she had nothing of what could be called shyness in her intercourse with him ; and yet he was conscious of an unapproachableness in Alice. Often, in the old man's presence, she mingled in the conversation that went on between him and Middleton, and with an acuteness that betokened a sphere of thought much beyond what could be customary with young English maidens ; and Middleton was often reminded of the theories of those in our own country, who believe that the amelioration of society depends greatly on the part that women shall hereafter take, according to their individual capacity, in all the various pursuits of life. These deeper thoughts, these higher qualities, surprised him as they showed themselves, when-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

ever occasion called them forth, under the light, gay, and frivolous exterior which she had at first seemed to present. Middleton often amused himself with surmises in what rank of life Alice could have been bred, being so free of all conventional rule, yet so nice and delicate in her perception of the true proprieties that she never shocked him.

One morning, when they had met in one of Middleton's rambles about the neighborhood, they began to talk of America; and Middleton described to Alice the stir that was being made in behalf of women's rights; and he said that whatever cause was generous and disinterested always, in that country, derived much of its power from the sympathy of women, and that the advocates of every such cause were in favor of yielding the whole field of human effort to be shared with women.

"I have been surprised," said he, "in the little I have seen and heard of Englishwomen, to discover what a difference there is between them and my own countrywomen."

"I have heard," said Alice, with a smile, "that your countrywomen are a far more delicate and fragile race than Englishwomen; pale, feeble hothouse plants, unfit for the wear and tear of life, without energy of character, or any slightest degree of physical strength to base it upon. If, now, you had these large-framed Englishwomen, you might, I should imagine, with better hopes, set about changing the system of society, so as to allow them to struggle in the strife of politics, or any other strife, hand to hand, or side by side with men."

APPENDIX

“If any countryman of mine has said this of our women,” exclaimed Middleton indignantly, “he is a slanderous villain, unworthy to have been borne by an American mother; if an Englishman has said it, — as I know many of them have and do, — let it pass as one of the many prejudices, only half believed, with which they strive to console themselves for the inevitable sense that the American race is destined to higher purposes than their own. But pardon me; I forgot that I was speaking to an Englishwoman, for indeed you do not remind me of them. But, I assure you, the world has not seen such women as make up, I had almost said the mass of womanhood in my own country; slight in aspect, slender in frame, as you suggest, but yet capable of bringing forth stalwart men; they themselves being of inexhaustible courage, patience, energy; soft and tender, deep of heart, but high of purpose; gentle, refined, but bold in every good cause.”

“O, you have said quite enough,” replied Alice, who had seemed ready to laugh outright, during this encomium. “I think I see one of these paragons now, in a Bloomer, I think you call it, swaggering along with a Bowie knife at her girdle, smoking a cigar, no doubt, and tippling sherry cobblers and mint juleps. It must be a pleasant life.”

“I should think you, at least, might form a more just idea of what women become,” said Middleton, considerably piqued, “in a country where the rules of conventionalism are somewhat relaxed; where woman, whatever you may think, is far more profoundly educated than in England, where a few ill-caught accom-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

plishments, a little geography, a catechism of science, make up the sum, under the superintendence of a governess; the mind being kept entirely inert as to any capacity for thought. They are cowards, except within certain rules and forms; they spend a life of old proprieties, and die, and if their souls do not die with them, it is Heaven's mercy."

Alice did not appear in the least moved to anger, though considerably to mirth, by this description of the character of English females. She laughed as she replied, "I see there is little danger of your leaving your heart in England." She added more seriously: "And permit me to say, I trust, Mr. Middleton, that you remain as much American in other respects as in your preference of your own race of women. The American who comes hither and persuades himself that he is one with Englishmen, it seems to me, makes a great mistake; at least, if he is correct in such an idea, he is not worthy of his own country, and the high development that awaits it. There is much that is seductive in our life, but I think it is not upon the higher impulses of our nature that such seductions act. I should think ill of the American who, for any causes of ambition, — any hope of wealth or rank, — or even for the sake of any of those old, delightful ideas of the past, the associations of ancestry, the loveliness of an age-long home, — the old poetry and romance that haunt these ancient villages and estates of England, — would give up the chance of acting upon the un moulded future of America."

"And you, an Englishwoman, speak thus!" exclaimed Middleton. "You perhaps speak truly; and

APPENDIX

it may be that your words go to a point where they are especially applicable at this moment. But where have you learned these ideas? And how is it that you know how to awake these sympathies, that have slept perhaps too long?"

"Think only if what I have said be truth," replied Alice. "It is no matter who or what I am that speak it."

"Do you speak," asked Middleton, from a sudden impulse, "with any secret knowledge affecting a matter now in my mind?"

Alice shook her head, as she turned away; but Middleton could not determine whether the gesture was meant as a negative to his question, or merely as declining to answer it. She left him; and he found himself strangely disturbed with thoughts of his own country, of the life that he ought to be leading there, the struggles in which he ought to be taking part; and, with these motives in his impressible mind, the motives that had hitherto kept him in England seemed unworthy to influence him.

May 15th, Saturday. — It was not long after Middleton's meeting with Mr. Eldredge in the park of Smithell's, that he received — what it is precisely the most common thing to receive — an invitation to dine at the manor house and spend the night. The note was written with much appearance of cordiality, as well as in a respectful style; and Middleton could not but perceive that Mr. Eldredge must have been making some inquiries as to his social status, in order to feel justified in putting him on this footing of equality. He had no hesitation in accepting the invi-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

tation, and on the appointed day was received in the old house of his forefathers as a guest. The owner met him, not quite on the frank and friendly footing expressed in his note, but still with a perfect and polished courtesy, which, however, could not hide from the sensitive Middleton a certain coldness, a something that seemed to him Italian rather than English; a symbol of a condition of things between them, undecided, suspicious, doubtful very likely. Middleton's own manner corresponded to that of his host, and they made few advances towards more intimate acquaintance. Middleton was, however, recompensed for his host's unapproachableness by the society of his daughter, a young lady born indeed in Italy, but who had been educated in a Catholic family in England; so that here was another relation — the first female one — to whom he had been introduced. She was a quiet, shy, undemonstrative young woman, with a fine bloom and other charms which she kept as much in the background as possible, with maiden reserve. (There is a Catholic priest at table.)

Mr. Eldredge talked chiefly, during dinner, of art, with which his long residence in Italy had made him thoroughly acquainted, and for which he seemed to have a genuine taste and enjoyment. It was a subject on which Middleton knew little; but he felt the interest in it which appears to be not uncharacteristic of Americans, among the earliest of their developments of cultivation; nor had he failed to use such few opportunities as the English public or private galleries offered him to acquire the rudiments of a taste. He was surprised at the depth of some of Mr. Eldredge's

APPENDIX

remarks on the topics thus brought up, and at the sensibility which appeared to be disclosed by his delicate appreciation of some of the excellences of those great masters who wrote their epics, their tender sonnets, or their simple ballads, upon canvas ; and Middleton conceived a respect for him which he had not hitherto felt, and which possibly Mr. Eldredge did not quite deserve. Taste seems to be a department of moral sense ; and yet it is so little identical with it, and so little implies conscience, that some of the worst men in the world have been the most refined.

After Miss Eldredge had retired, the host appeared to desire to make the dinner a little more social than it had hitherto been ; he called for a peculiar species of wine from Southern Italy, which he said was the most delicious production of the grape, and had very seldom, if ever before, been imported pure into England. A delicious perfume came from the cradled bottle, and bore an ethereal, evanescent testimony to the truth of what he said ; and the taste, though too delicate for wine quaffed in England, was nevertheless delicious, when minutely dwelt upon.

“It gives me pleasure to drink your health, Mr. Middleton,” said the host. “We might well meet as friends in England, for I am hardly more an Englishman than yourself ; bred up, as I have been, in Italy, and coming back hither at my age, unaccustomed to the manners of the country, with few friends, and insulated from society by a faith which makes most people regard me as an enemy. I seldom welcome people here, Mr. Middleton ; but you are welcome.”

“I thank you, Mr. Eldredge, and may fairly say

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

that the circumstances to which you allude make me accept your hospitality with a warmer feeling than I otherwise might. Strangers, meeting in a strange land, have a sort of tie in their foreignness to those around them, though there be no positive relation between themselves."

"We are friends, then?" said Mr. Eldredge, looking keenly at Middleton, as if to discover exactly how much was meant by the compact. He continued: "You know, I suppose, Mr. Middleton, the situation in which I find myself on returning to my hereditary estate, which has devolved to me somewhat unexpectedly by the death of a younger man than myself. There is an old flaw here, as perhaps you have been told, which keeps me out of a property long kept in the guardianship of the crown, and of a barony, one of the oldest in England. There is an idea — a tradition — a legend, founded, however, on evidence of some weight, that there is still in existence the possibility of finding the proof which we need, to confirm our cause."

"I am most happy to hear it, Mr. Eldredge," said Middleton.

"But," continued his host, "I am bound to remember and to consider that for several generations there seems to have been the same idea, and the same expectation; whereas nothing has ever come of it. Now, among other suppositions — perhaps wild ones — it has occurred to me that this testimony, the desirable proof, may exist on your side of the Atlantic; for it has long enough been sought here in vain."

"As I said in our meeting in your park, Mr. Eldredge," replied Middleton, "such a suggestion may

APPENDIX

very possibly be true; yet let me point out that the long lapse of years, and the continual melting and dissolving of family institutions, — the consequent scattering of family documents, and the annihilation of traditions from memory, — all conspire against its probability.”

“And yet, Mr. Middleton,” said his host, “when we talked together at our first singular interview, you made use of an expression — of one remarkable phrase — which dwelt upon my memory and now recurs to it.”

“And what was that, Mr. Eldredge?” asked Middleton.

“You spoke,” replied his host, “of the Bloody Footstep reappearing on the threshold of the old palace of S——. Now where, let me ask you, did you ever hear this strange name, which you then spoke, and which I have since spoken?”

“From my father’s lips, when a child, in America,” responded Middleton.

“It is very strange,” said Mr. Eldredge, in a hasty, dissatisfied tone. “I do not see my way through this.”

May 16th, Sunday. — Middleton had been put into a chamber in the oldest part of the house, the furniture of which was of antique splendor, well befitting to have come down for ages, well befitting the hospitality shown to noble and even royal guests. It was the same room in which, at his first visit to the house, Middleton’s attention had been drawn to the cabinet, which he had subsequently remembered as the palatial residence in which he had harbored so many dreams. It still stood in the chamber, making the principal object in it, in-

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

deed; and when Middleton was left alone, he contemplated it not without a certain awe, which at the same time he felt to be ridiculous. He advanced towards it, and stood contemplating the mimic façade, wondering at the singular fact of this piece of furniture having been preserved in traditionary history, when so much had been forgotten, — when even the features and architectural characteristics of the mansion in which it was merely a piece of furniture had been forgotten. And, as he gazed at it, he half thought himself an actor in a fairy portal [tale?]; and would not have been surprised — at least, he would have taken it with the composure of a dream — if the mimic portal had unclosed, and a form of pigmy majesty had appeared within, beckoning him to enter and find the revelation of what had so long perplexed him. The key of the cabinet was in the lock, and knowing that it was not now the receptacle of anything in the shape of family papers, he threw it open; and there appeared the mosaic floor, the representation of a stately, pillared hall, with the doors on either side, opening, as would seem, into various apartments. And here should have stood the visionary figures of his ancestry, waiting to welcome the descendant of their race, who had so long delayed his coming. After looking and musing a considerable time, — even till the old clock from the turret of the house told twelve, — he turned away with a sigh, and went to bed. The wind moaned through the ancestral trees; the old house creaked as with ghostly footsteps; the curtains of his bed seemed to waver. He was now at home; yes, he had found his home, and was sheltered at last under the ancestral roof after all

APPENDIX

those long, long wanderings, — after the little log-built hut of the early settlement, after the straight roof of the American house, after all the many roofs of two hundred years, here he was at last under the one which he had left, on that fatal night, when the Bloody Footstep was so mysteriously impressed on the threshold. As he drew nearer and nearer towards sleep, it seemed more and more to him as if he were the very individual — the selfsame one throughout the whole — who had done, seen, suffered, all these long toils and vicissitudes, and were now come back to rest, and found his weariness so great that there could be no rest.

Nevertheless, he did sleep; and it may be that his dreams went on, and grew vivid, and perhaps became truer in proportion to their vividness. When he awoke he had a perception, an intuition, that he had been dreaming about the cabinet, which, in his sleeping imagination, had again assumed the magnitude and proportions of a stately mansion, even as he had seen it afar from the other side of the Atlantic. Some dim associations remained lingering behind, the dying shadows of very vivid ones which had just filled his mind; but as he looked at the cabinet, there was some idea that still seemed to come so near his consciousness that, every moment, he felt on the point of grasping it. During the process of dressing, he still kept his eyes turned involuntarily towards the cabinet, and at last he approached it, and looked within the mimic portal, still endeavoring to recollect what it was that he had heard or dreamed about it, — what half-obliterated remembrance from childhood, what fragmentary last night's dream it was, that thus haunted him. It must have

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

been some association of one or the other nature that led him to press his finger on one particular square of the mosaic pavement ; and as he did so, the thin plate of polished marble slipped aside. It disclosed, indeed, no hollow receptacle, but only another leaf of marble, in the midst of which appeared to be a keyhole : to this Middleton applied the little antique key to which we have several times alluded, and found it fit precisely. The instant it was turned, the whole mimic floor of the hall rose, by the action of a secret spring, and discovered a shallow recess beneath. Middleton looked eagerly in, and saw that it contained documents, with antique seals of wax appended ; he took but one glance at them, and closed the receptacle as it was before.

Why did he do so ? He felt that there would be a meanness and wrong in inspecting these family papers, coming to the knowledge of them, as he had, through the opportunities offered by the hospitality of the owner of the estate ; nor, on the other hand, did he feel such confidence in his host as to make him willing to trust these papers in his hands, with any certainty that they would be put to an honorable use. The case was one demanding consideration, and he put a strong curb upon his impatient curiosity, conscious that, at all events, his first impulsive feeling was that he ought not to examine these papers without the presence of his host or some other authorized witness. Had he exercised any casuistry about the point, however, he might have argued that these papers, according to all appearance, dated from a period to which his own hereditary claims ascended, and to circumstances in which his own rightful interest was as strong as that

APPENDIX

of Mr. Eldredge. But he had acted on his first impulse, closed the secret receptacle, and hastening his toilet descended from his room ; and, it being still too early for breakfast, resolved to ramble about the immediate vicinity of the house. As he passed the little chapel, he heard within the voice of the priest performing mass, and felt how strange was this sign of mediæval religion and foreign manners in homely England.

As the story looks now : Eldredge, bred, and perhaps born, in Italy, and a Catholic, with views to the church before he inherited the estate, has not the English moral sense and simple honor ; can scarcely be called an Englishman at all. Dark suspicions of past crime, and of the possibility of future crime, may be thrown around him ; an atmosphere of doubt shall envelop him, though, as regards manners, he may be highly refined. Middleton shall find in the house a priest ; and at his first visit he shall have seen a small chapel, adorned with the richness, as to marbles, pictures, and frescoes, of those that we see in the churches at Rome ; and here the Catholic forms of worship shall be kept up. Eldredge shall have had an Italian mother, and shall have the personal characteristics of an Italian. There shall be something sinister about him, the more apparent when Middleton's visit draws to a conclusion ; and the latter shall feel convinced that they part in enmity, so far as Eldredge is concerned. He shall not speak of his discovery in the cabinet.

May 17th, Monday. — Unquestionably, the appointment of Middleton as minister to one of the minor

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

Continental courts must take place in the interval between Eldredge's meeting him in the park and his inviting him to his house. After Middleton's appointment, the two encounter each other at the Mayor's dinner in St. Mary's Hall, and Eldredge, startled at meeting the vagrant, as he deemed him, under such a character, remembers the hints of some secret knowledge of the family history, which Middleton had thrown out. He endeavors, both in person and by the priest, to make out what Middleton really is, and what he knows, and what he intends; but Middleton is on his guard, yet cannot help arousing Eldredge's suspicions that he has views upon the estate and title. It is possible, too, that Middleton may have come to the knowledge — may have had some knowledge — of some shameful or criminal fact connected with Mr. Eldredge's life on the Continent; the old Hospitaller, possibly, may have told him this, from some secret malignity hereafter to be accounted for. Supposing Eldredge to attempt his murder, by poison for instance, bringing back into modern life his old hereditary Italian plots; and into English life a sort of crime which does not belong to it, — which did not, at least, although at this very period there have been fresh and numerous instances of it. There might be a scene in which Middleton and Eldredge come to a fierce and bitter explanation; for in Eldredge's character there must be the English surly boldness as well as the Italian subtlety; and here, Middleton shall tell him what he knows of his past character and life, and also what he knows of his own hereditary claims. Eldredge might have committed a murder in Italy;

APPENDIX

might have been a patriot, and betrayed his friends to death for a bribe, bearing another name than his own in Italy ; indeed, he might have joined them only as an informer. All this he had tried to sink, when he came to England in the character of a gentleman of ancient name and large estate. But this infamy of his previous character must be foreboded from the first by the manner in which Eldredge is introduced ; and it must make his evil designs on Middleton appear natural and probable. It may be that Middleton has learned Eldredge's previous character, through some Italian patriot who had taken refuge in America, and there become intimate with him ; and it should be a piece of secret history, not known to the world in general, so that Middleton might seem to Eldredge the sole depository of the secret then in England. He feels a necessity of getting rid of him ; and thenceforth Middleton's path lies always among pitfalls ; indeed, the first attempt should follow promptly and immediately on his rupture with Eldredge. The utmost pains must be taken with this incident to give it an air of reality ; or else it must be quite removed out of the sphere of reality by an intensified atmosphere of romance. I think the old Hospitaller must interfere to prevent the success of this attempt, perhaps through the means of Alice.

The result of Eldredge's criminal and treacherous designs is, somehow or other, that he comes to his death ; and Middleton and Alice are left to administer on the remains of the story ; perhaps, the Mayor being his friend, he may be brought into play here. The foreign ecclesiastic shall likewise come forward,

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

and he shall prove to be a man of subtile policy, perhaps, yet a man of religion and honor; with a Jesuit's principles, but a Jesuit's devotion and self-sacrifice. The old Hospitaller must die in his bed, or some other how; or perhaps not — we shall see. He may just as well be left in the Hospital. Eldredge's attempt on Middleton must be in some way peculiar to Italy, and which he shall have learned there; and, by the way, at his dinner table there shall be a Venice glass, one of the kind that were supposed to be shattered when poison was put into them. When Eldredge produces his rare wine, he shall pour it into this, with a jesting allusion to the legend. Perhaps the mode of Eldredge's attempt on Middleton's life shall be a reproduction of the attempt made two hundred years before; and Middleton's knowledge of that incident shall be the means of his salvation. That would be a good idea; in fact, I think it must be done so, and no otherwise. It is not to be forgotten that there is a taint of insanity in Eldredge's blood, accounting for much that is wild and absurd, at the same time that it must be subtile, in his conduct; one of those perplexing mad people, whose lunacy you are continually mistaking for wickedness, or *vice versa*. This shall be the priest's explanation and apology for him, after his death. I wish I could get hold of the Newgate Calendar, the older volumes, or any other book of murders, — the Causes Célèbres, for instance. The legendary murder, or attempt at it, will bring its own imaginative probability with it, when repeated by Eldredge; and at the same time it will have a dreamlike effect; so that Middleton shall hardly know whether

APPENDIX

he is awake or not. This incident is very essential towards bringing together the past time and the present, and the two ends of the story.

May 18th, Tuesday. — All down through the ages since Edward had disappeared from home, leaving that bloody footstep on the threshold, there had been legends and strange stories of the murder and the manner of it. These legends differed very much among themselves. According to some, his brother had awaited him there, and stabbed him on the threshold. According to others, he had been murdered in his chamber, and dragged out. A third story told, that he was escaping with his lady love, when they were overtaken on the threshold, and the young man slain. It was impossible at this distance of time to ascertain which of these legends was the true one, or whether either of them had any portion of truth, further than that the young man had actually disappeared from that night, and that it never was certainly known to the public that any intelligence had ever afterwards been received from him. Now, Middleton may have communicated to Eldredge the truth in regard to the matter; as, for instance, that he had stabbed him with a certain dagger that was still kept among the curiosities of the manor house. Of course, that will not do. It must be some very ingenious and artificially natural thing, an artistic affair in its way, that should strike the fancy of such a man as Eldredge, and appear to him altogether fit, *mutatis mutandis*, to be applied to his own requirements and purposes. I do not at present see in the least how this is to be wrought out. There shall be everything to make Eldredge look with

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

the utmost horror and alarm at any chance that he may be superseded and ousted from his possession of the estate ; for he shall only recently have established his claim to it, tracing out his pedigree, when the family was supposed to be extinct. And he is come to these comfortable quarters after a life of poverty, uncertainty, difficulty, hanging loose on society ; and therefore he shall be willing to risk soul and body both, rather than return to his former state. Perhaps his daughter shall be introduced as a young Italian girl, to whom Middleton shall decide to leave the estate.

On the failure of his design, Eldredge may commit suicide, and be found dead in the wood ; at any rate, some suitable end shall be contrived, adapted to his wants. This character must not be so represented as to shut him out completely from the reader's sympathies ; he shall have taste, sentiment, even a capacity for affection, nor, I think, ought he to have any hatred or bitter feeling against the man whom he resolves to murder. In the closing scenes, when he thinks the fate of Middleton approaching, there might even be a certain tenderness towards him, a desire to make the last drops of life delightful ; if well done, this would produce a certain sort of horror, that I do not remember to have seen effected in literature. Possibly the ancient emigrant might be supposed to have fallen into an ancient mine, down a precipice, into some pitfall ; no, not so. Into a river ; into a moat. As Middleton's pretensions to birth are not publicly known, there will be no reason why, at his sudden death, suspicion should fix on Eldredge as the murderer ; and it

APPENDIX

shall be his object so to contrive his death as that it shall appear the result of accident. Having failed in effecting Middleton's death by this excellent way, he shall perhaps think that he cannot do better than to make his own exit in precisely the same manner. It might be easy, and as delightful as any death could be; no ugliness in it, no blood; for the Bloody Footstep of old times might be the result of the failure of the old plot, not of its success. Poison seems to be the only elegant method; but poison is vulgar, and in many respects unfit for my purpose. It won't do. Whatever it may be, it must not come upon the reader as a sudden and new thing, but as one that might have been foreseen from afar, though he shall not actually have foreseen it until it is about to happen. It must be prevented through the agency of Alice. Alice may have been an artist in Rome, and there have known Eldredge and his daughter, and thus she may have become their guest in England; or he may be patronizing her now — at all events she shall be the friend of the daughter, and shall have a just appreciation of the father's character. It shall be partly due to her high counsel that Middleton foregoes his claim to the estate, and prefers the life of an American, with its lofty possibilities for himself and his race, to the position of an Englishman of property and title; and she, for her part, shall choose the condition and prospects of woman in America, to the emptiness of the life of a woman of rank in England. So they shall depart, lofty and poor, out of the home which might be their own, if they would stoop to make it so. Possibly the daughter of Eldredge may be a girl not yet in her

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

teens, for whom Alice has the affection of an elder sister.

It should be a very carefully and highly wrought scene, occurring just before Eldredge's actual attempt on Middleton's life, in which all the brilliancy of his character — which shall before have gleamed upon the reader — shall come out, with pathos, with wit, with insight, with knowledge of life. Middleton shall be inspired by this, and shall vie with him in exhilaration of spirits; but the ecclesiastic shall look on with singular attention, and some appearance of alarm; and the suspicion of Alice shall likewise be aroused. The old Hospitaller may have gained his situation partly by proving himself a man of the neighborhood, by right of descent; so that he, too, shall have a hereditary claim to be in the Romance.

Eldredge's own position as a foreigner in the midst of English home life, insulated and dreary, shall represent to Middleton, in some degree, what his own would be, were he to accept the estate. But Middleton shall not come to the decision to resign it, without having to repress a deep yearning for that sense of long, long rest in an age-consecrated home, which he had felt so deeply to be the happy lot of Englishmen. But this ought to be rejected, as not belonging to his country, nor to the age, nor any longer possible.

May 19th, Wednesday. — The connection of the old Hospitaller with the story is not at all clear. He is an American by birth, but deriving his English origin from the neighborhood of the Hospital, where he has finally established himself. Some one of his ancestors may have been somehow connected with the

APPENDIX •

ancient portion of the story. He has been a friend of Middleton's father, who reposed entire confidence in him, trusting him with all his fortune, which the Hospitaller risked in his enormous speculations, and lost it all. His fame had been great in the financial world. There were circumstances that made it dangerous for his whereabouts to be known, and so he had come hither and found refuge in this institution, where Middleton finds him, but does not know who he is. In the vacancy of a mind formerly so active, he has taken to the study of local antiquities ; and from his former intimacy with Middleton's father, he has a knowledge of the American part of the story, which he connects with the English portion, disclosed by his researches here ; so that he is quite aware that Middleton has claims to the estate, which might be urged successfully against the present possessor. He is kindly disposed towards the son of his friend, whom he had so greatly injured ; but he is now very old, and ———. Middleton has been directed to this old man by a friend in America, as one likely to afford him all possible assistance in his researches ; and so he seeks him out and forms an acquaintance with him, which the old man encourages to a certain extent, taking an evident interest in him, but does not disclose himself ; nor does Middleton suspect him to be an American. The characteristic life of the Hospital is brought out, and the individual character of this old man, vegetating here after an active career, melancholy and miserable ; sometimes torpid with the slow approach of utmost age ; sometimes feeble, peevish, wavering ; sometimes shining out with a wisdom

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

resulting from originally bright faculties, ripened by experience. The character must not be allowed to get vague, but, with gleams of romance, must yet be kept homely and natural by little touches of his daily life.

As for Alice, I see no necessity for her being any-wise related to or connected with the old Hospitaller. As originally conceived, I think she may be an artist — a sculptress — whom Eldredge had known in Rome. No ; she might be a granddaughter of the old Hospitaller, born and bred in America, but who had resided two or three years in Rome in the study of her art, and have there acquired a knowledge of the Eldredges and have become fond of the little Italian girl his daughter. She has lodgings in the village, and of course is often at the Hospital, and often at the Hall ; she makes busts and little statues, and is free, wild, tender, proud, domestic, strange, natural, artistic, and has at bottom the characteristics of the American woman, with the principles of the strong-minded sect ; and Middleton shall be continually puzzled at meeting such a phenomenon in England. By and by, the internal influence [evidence ?] of her sentiments (though there shall be nothing to confirm it in her manner) shall lead him to charge her with being an American.

Now, as to the arrangement of the Romance ; — it begins as an integral and essential part, with my introduction, giving a pleasant and familiar summary of my life in the Consulate at Liverpool ; the strange species of Americans, with strange purposes, in England, whom I used to meet there ; and, especially, how my countrymen used to be put out of their senses by the idea of

APPENDIX

inheritances of English property. Then I shall particularly instance one gentleman who called on me on first coming over; a description of him must be given, with touches that shall puzzle the reader to decide whether it is not an actual portrait. And then this Romance shall be offered, half seriously, as the account of the fortunes that he met with in his search for his hereditary home. Enough of his ancestral story may be given to explain what is to follow in the Romance; or perhaps this may be left to the scenes of his intercourse with the old Hospitaller.

The Romance proper opens with Middleton's arrival at what he has reason to think is the neighborhood of his ancestral home, and here he makes application to the old Hospitaller. Middleton shall be described as approaching the Hospital, which shall be pretty literally copied after Leicester's, although the surrounding village must be on a much smaller scale, of course. Much elaborateness may be given to this portion of the book. Middleton shall have assumed a plain dress, and shall seek to make no acquaintances except that of the old Hospitaller; the acquaintance of Alice naturally following. The old Hospitaller and he go together to the old Hall, where, as they pass through the rooms, they find that the proprietor is flitting like a ghost before them from chamber to chamber; they catch his reflection in a glass, etc., etc. When these have been wrought up sufficiently, shall come the scene in the wood, where Eldredge is seen yielding to the superstition that he has inherited, respecting the old secret of the family, on the discovery of which depends the enforcement of his claim to a title. All this while,

THE ANCESTRAL FOOTSTEP

Middleton has appeared in the character of a man of no note ; and now, through some political change, not necessarily told, he receives a packet addressed to him as an ambassador, and containing a notice of his appointment to that dignity. A paragraph in the Times confirms the fact, and makes it known in the neighborhood. Middleton immediately becomes an object of attention : the gentry call upon him ; the Mayor of the neighboring county town invites him to dinner, which shall be described with all its antique formalities. Here he meets Eldredge, who is surprised, remembering the encounter in the wood ; but passes it all off, like a man of the world, makes his acquaintance, and invites him to the Hall. Perhaps he may make a visit of some time here, and become intimate, to a certain degree, with all parties ; and here things shall ripen themselves for Eldredge's attempt upon his life.

